

Erasing History

Chapter One: Family Life

Harry Potter walked in the door of his home, aptly named Marauder Mansion one evening, exhausted. He was one of the Ministry of Magic's best Unspeakables although to most Ministry employees he was known simply as Hunter. Only his team in the Unspeakables, and his bosses knew his true identity. His family, consisting of his wife, Hermione, and his three children, Daniel, Sirius and Lily, knew nothing about his job beyond that it was at the Ministry. Harry sometimes suspected that Hermione knew more than she was letting on but if she did she hadn't confronted him about it.

"DAD!!" screamed three voices and Harry turned round, smiling widely as his three children all assaulted him at once. The twenty-six-year old went down under a merciless attack by his four-year-old twin sons and two-year old daughter.

"Mercy, mercy," he finally called, and the kids crawled off him, still giggling. Harry sat up and mock-glared at them. "So what did you three terrors get up to today before you attacked me," he enquired, wandlessly healing the minor scrapes he'd got from his collision with the floor.

"Lots Daddy," Lily said, grinning at him.

Harry raised his eyebrows. "Lots huh. What did you do and why are you all green?"

"We painted the walls Dad," Sirius said proudly. Daniel chimed in with "Yes, we painted them bright green. It's the same color as your eyes."

Harry grinned. "Green you say. Which room did you paint green?"

"Your study. We also painted Mum. We tried to paint Hedwig too but

she scratched us," Sirius complained, showing a large scratch on his arm.

Harry examined it before tapping his son's arm gently with his wand and healing it. "Hmm. Well, next time you're painting, remember that owls don't like paint. Hedwig is supposed to be white. Now, where's your mother?"

Lily giggled. "We tied her up Daddy."

"Tied her up where and how did you do that?" Harry asked, having to fight to keep from laughing. He got to his feet and allowed himself to be pulled to the sitting room where he discovered Hermione tied to the couch with lots and lots of duct tape. He smirked, very nearly losing the battle against hilarity as he saw that Hermione was bright green in addition to being tied up. "I see. Kids, how did you do this and why can't your mother free herself?" He silently Vanished the duct tape surrounding Hermione's mouth so she could speak as well. Fortunately the children hadn't duct taped her nose so she had been able to breathe.

Hermione interrupted him. She glared at her husband and fumed, "Because your little Marauders kicked my wand out of reach and you know my wandless magic skills aren't as good as yours."

Harry now laughed outright. "What about silent magic? As I recall, you were far better at that than I was at school. It was only after I started my job that I got really good at it."

Hermione hissed at him, sounding rather like Crookshanks. "Silent magic only works when you've got your wand in your hand as you know very well Harry Potter! After they did this they decided to paint your study. I hear it's a very fetching shade of green."

Harry chuckled. "Not to mention you my dear," he said, before silently Vanishing the rest of the duct tape bonds. He and Hermione walked

towards the study to see the extent of the damage. "Now that you're free, how has your day been? And why are our children suddenly only mine?"

Hermione glared at him once more before allowing the humor of the situation to present itself and she chuckled ruefully. "It's been fine. I don't know about the state of your study though. They went in there with cans of green paint and came out covered in it. I shudder to think of the state of the room. As for the kids, they are yours whenever they've been up to mischief. It's a Potter family trait I swear."

Harry shrugged. "I was planning on redecorating anyway. They just saved me the job of...." He stared as they reached the door of his study. Everything was green. The walls were green. His desk was green. The papers he'd left on his desk were green. The windows and curtains were green. He groaned, sinking down to the green carpet and then began to laugh.

"Do you like it Dad?" Daniel asked. Harry and Hermione looked round to see their children staring anxiously at their father. Harry held out an arm and all three crowded into his arms. "Yes I like it. But next time, could you please allow your mother to help. I like the walls, the carpet and," he looked up as a drip of paint landed on his nose, "the ceiling, but she could help you with the tricky spots. Now, how about I get all this dry and return a few of these things to their previous color."

With a few waves of his wand the desk, papers, windows and curtains were free of paint. The ceiling received the same treatment, returning to its previous cream color. The walls were left alone as Harry actually did like the emerald green color. They just got a super strength drying charm fired at them. The carpet was changed to a deep gold, with a green fringe round the outside. When he was finished he turned round and said, "Well, how do you like it?"

After approval was given by all the family, Harry found himself dragged to the sitting room. He was then pushed down into his favorite armchair by the fire and the three kids jumped onto his lap. Harry did some discreet rearranging of limbs when Lily accidentally stuck her foot in a sensitive area, and rescued his neck from the stranglehold the twins had on it.

"There, now. Have you had dinner yet?" he enquired. Enthusiastic nodding greeted this question and Harry smiled. "Good. Was it up to standard?"

"Yes Harry. You know Dobby and Winky wouldn't cook substandard stuff for our kids," Hermione commented, examining her now green free hands. She'd cast a cleaning charm on herself and the children as soon as she'd got her wand back. Harry just chuckled at her comment.

"True" he murmured in reply, enjoying simply holding his children. All three were precious to him, along with Hermione. He'd do anything short of becoming like the very much deceased Voldemort to keep them safe.

An hour later it was the kids' bedtime and predictably, they didn't want to go. Finally Harry got tired of the debate. "You three are going to bed whether you feel tired or not."

Daniel glared at him. "Why? We want to stay up with you and Mum!" This was punctuated by a long yawn.

Harry knelt down so he was at eye level with them all and replied, "Because despite your wishes, you are tired. That yawn should have told you that. Go up to bed, and in the morning we can play a game."

"OK Dad. Can we play lion hunt again?" Sirius mumbled.

Harry smiled gently and replied, "Of course. Now, all of you, upstairs

and in bed. Don't forget your teeth."

Hermione followed them upstairs to supervise the teeth brushing and then tucked them in as Harry relaxed downstairs. Dobby popped in with dinner for both him and Hermione which he accepted gratefully, tucking in rapidly as his stomach protested its lack of food.

"So how was your day Hunter?" Hermione asked calmly as she sat down opposite him. Harry waved his fork around as he answered "Fine" before her words penetrated his brain fully. The fork clattered onto the plate as he stared at his wife.

"You know?" he asked.

Hermione gave him a slightly exasperated look. "Yes love I know. I've known for a while now." She gave Harry a slightly hurt look. "Honestly Harry I realize the necessity of keeping it from our children, but does that secrecy clause thing they had you sign really prevent you from telling your wife? I am trained in Occlumency you know."

Harry sighed. "I know you are Mione, but I didn't want you worrying every time I went out on a mission. You know there are still some Death Eaters out there and my team and I are at the forefront of the search for them. Most of them refuse to come quietly, hence the fights I've sometimes been in."

Hermione sighed too and leaned forward to hug him. "I know Harry but I was at your side during the fight with Voldemort. I'm not exactly going to break if you tell me you're off on a dangerous mission. I understand the danger element to it and I think the job is suited to you. Far better than Quidditch at any rate."

"Still annoyed about the training brooms I got Dan and Siri last Christmas?" Harry teased.

Hermione snorted. "No. I'll be more worried when you get them

proper brooms. As I recall, Siri wanted you to teach him to dive first and foremost."

Harry shook his head. "And I told you, he can beg and plead all he wants, I'm going to teach all of them to fly safely. None of them will be learning to dive until they're at Hogwarts and if they try it on their own I'll ground them, OK?"

"OK. I know you won't endanger them needlessly but they are your children. They're bound to get into mischief at some stage."

"And we'll be here to extract them from it."

A chime from the Floo alerted them to a call and Harry threw some powder into the flames. "Hey Draco," he said, grinning as he saw his former rival who had turned into one of his best friends. Draco had been best man at Harry and Hermione's wedding, and he was also the Head Auror.

"Hey Harry. Are the kids in bed yet?" Draco enquired.

Harry nodded. "Yep. It's a battle more and more often as they get older. When they're a bit older we might have to increase their stay up time."

"Yeah well, they'll learn. You're a bit of a pushover you know. All they have to do is give you the puppy dog look and you cave in," Draco grinned as he came through the fire.

"I do not," Harry retorted indignantly. "I just give them a certain amount of leeway in what is and isn't acceptable. They know where the boundaries are."

"Yes and every time they cross one, you have to really work at remaining firm with them dear. I've seen it," Hermione said with an impish grin.

Harry groaned. "I can't win with you two can I? I give up."

"Finally. So, what's got the great Hunter all tired and worn out tonight?" Draco enquired, sinking down onto the couch.

Harry shook his head. "Training new recruits. My team was given a rest but I was pulled in to give the newbies some dueling training."

"Are they any good?"

"Not really. Put them up against a Death Eater and they'd die in seconds. The worst of it is they think that I don't know what I'm talking about and that they're the best in the world. I heard one of them bragging about how he could beat Harry Potter in a full duel. I had just run him into the ground a few minutes earlier and I seriously thought about revealing myself just to give the arrogant sod a reality check."

"So why didn't you?"

"The press knows me as Hunter. I don't want the news that I'm an Unspeakable being splashed on the front page of the Prophet thank you very much."

"Skeeter still being a pain?"

Harry smiled grimly. "Not so much now. No, it's the regular writers I'm worried about. I make just enough public appearances and give enough quotes to keep them happy but they still want more. Did you know they wanted photos of Dan and Siri only a few hours after they were born?"

"No. Can they do that?" Draco asked, outraged. Hermione was quietly simmering too, the birth of the twins had been a hard one, and there had been complications with Lily's too.

Harry shook his head. "I went to the editor and complained and got him to agree to leave my family out of the spotlight. No photos of Hermione or the kids will appear in the paper unless I personally approve it."

Draco nodded. "Good. Look, this wasn't just a social visit. I was hoping that you'd give a talk to the Aurors about what it was like to fight the old snake, and how you finally beat him."

Harry stayed silent for a few minutes, before he smirked. "Would you mind one of our Unspeakable trainees sitting in? That brat who proclaimed he could beat me in a duel for instance?"

Draco smirked back. "Perfect. I know some of our cadets are longing for a chance to duel the Defeater-of-Voldemort too. Perhaps a mass duel? You versus anyone willing to duel you?"

Harry smirked again. "Alright. When's the talk being held?"

"Two days from now. We'll sort out the details later. Now that that's out of the way, how are you?"

Harry smiled sadly. "Every time one of the kids does something new, or begs me to teach them something, or even tonight, with the argument over bedtime, I can't help but think of all the things I missed out on. Things which you and Hermione probably took for granted but which I never got."

"You mean cuddles and bedtime stories and being held and fussed over if you hurt yourself?" Draco asked.

Harry nodded. "Yes. I'm trying to be a good father to them but I'm learning that sometimes, being a good parent doesn't always mean that you're a very popular one."

Draco snorted. "If your kids are anything like you were then you'll have grey hair by the time they graduate."

Harry nodded ruefully. "Yes. I can't help but wonder though what my parents' reaction would have been to my adventures."

Draco choked and almost fell off his seat laughing. "Harry, I think their hair would be permanently white. You definitely wouldn't have got into as much trouble as you did if you'd had parents around. They'd have really chewed you out over that flying car in second year."

Harry frowned. "Most probably. Remus once told me that second year was the year I should have been glad that Mum and Dad were dead, otherwise I'd have got two Howlers."

Draco chuckled, imagining the scene. "The Great Hall windows wouldn't have survived the explosion if you'd got two at the same time that Ronald got his."

Harry scowled at the mention of his former friend before chuckling at the mental image of the Great Hall windows exploding. "I suppose so."

"Has McGonagall contacted you about the DADA job?" Draco asked casually.

Harry nodded. "I don't want the job. I don't want to teach all day, every day. I want to be able to come home to my family every night, not be stuck at Hogwarts for a whole year. Besides, you know what happened in our seventh year. Why would I want to go back? No, I think you'd do a better job than I would."

Draco snorted. "I do know what happened in our seventh year Harry. I also know that McGonagall's very attached to you, and even Sev misses you at times."

Harry grinned. "He just misses being able to insult me," he smirked.

Draco looked at the ceiling, pretending to be thinking up an answer. "Most likely, but he does have a lot of respect for you. He just hides it well. As for McGonagall, you're one of her lions and will always be so to her. Not to mention you're the bloody Heir of Gryffindor."

Harry shrugged. "So. That doesn't mean I'd be a good teacher. You take the job. And tell Minerva that if she misses me so much, she should come to tea more often. Invite Severus too, I'd like to see him more. The quality of my verbal sparring opponents just don't match up to him."

Draco chuckled at the answer and fell silent. The only sound in the room for a while was the pleasant crackling of the fire as the three were content to sit in comfortable silence, just relaxing.

"What's that?" Draco asked an hour or two later. Harry and Hermione both listened intently before Hermione rose. "It's Lily. She's probably had a nightmare or something. I'll go calm her down."

Before she could reach the door, running footsteps announced Lily's arrival. The three-year-old launched herself through the open door and into Harry's arms, where she clung, crying almost hysterically.

Harry had automatically wrapped his arms around his daughter and was now trying to calm her down to no avail. He looked up when Hermione passed him a half-strength dose of calming potion.

"Here love, can you drink this for me," he said softly, trying to get Lily to drink the potion. Eventually she drank it and soon calmed enough for Harry to comfort her.

"Now, what's got you so scared little one," he murmured. Hermione and Draco withdrew from the sitting room into the library next door. "He's so good with all of them," Hermione said after casting a

silencing charm so she and Sirius could talk without disturbing Harry and Lily.

"Yeah he is. I remember he was so nervous about becoming a father, he was worried about ending up like that pathetic Muggle uncle of his," Draco commented. Hermione nodded. "He got advice from Arthur and Molly, and my parents too. He needn't have worried really; he's a natural at it."

Draco snorted. "He is. It's like he was born to be a father. Has he finished yet?"

In the sitting room, Harry had finally managed to get Lily to talk. In broken sentences, interrupted by hiccups and the odd sniffle she told him what had scared her.

"Mean, really mean man. Red hair, like Uncle Fred an' George but darker. He didn't like you, and he hurt us. There was also another man."

"Hurt you how love and who was the other man?" Harry questioned, keeping his tone gentle, while his mind searched for any red haired men that he knew that didn't like his family. The only one he could think of was Ron, who had been very jealous and angry when Hermione had married Harry and not him. Abruptly Harry's mind recalled one of the reasons Hermione had chosen him over Ron.

"You can't talk to any other guys Hermione, they'll try and steal you" Ron yelled at her in the Gryffindor common room in the Trio's seventh year. Harry looked up from his Transfiguration homework with a frown, not liking where this was going.

"I'll talk to who I want Ronald Weasley, just because I'm your girlfriend doesn't stop me from talking to other guys. Would you be this upset if it was Harry I was talking to?" Hermione snapped back.

"Yes!" Ron snarled. "You're mine Hermione, no one else's."

Hermione had gone quiet, and was shaking with a combination of fear and anger. "I am no one's property Ronald, least of all yours. We're through!"

Hermione turned to go up the stairs to the girl's dormitory and Ron snapped. He caught her by the wrist and raised his other hand, pushing Hermione back against the wall. As his hand descended Hermione flinched, but the blow never landed.

"Let. Her. Go." Harry growled quietly. He had Ron's wrist trapped in a vice-like grip and wasn't showing any signs of letting go. A slight twist of the captive limb had Ron letting Hermione go and she scrambled back out of reach, watching as Harry shoved Ron back against the same wall.

Harry's voice was quiet and menacing as he hissed, "If you ever attempt to strike Hermione or any other witch ever again Ronald Weasley then you will have me to answer to! I know your parents raised you better than this. Leave Hermione alone. Never come near her or me again. Our friendship is over."

He dropped Ron's wrist and walked away, not looking back. Ron stood there for a few minutes, gaping, before storming out of the common room.

"Hermione?" Harry asked quietly, sitting down next to his best friend. She clung to him, crying, while Harry just held her and let her get all her emotions regarding the incident out of her system while he planned how best to help her should Ron try to attack her again.

Harry shook himself out of the memory and returned his attention to Lily. "He killed Siri and Dan, and then he killed Mummy. He killed me last but I saw you Daddy. You were trying to save us but you couldn't. I heard you say Ron. I didn't hear the other man's name but he

looked funny."

"Funny how love?" Harry questioned, trying to get as much information as possible.

"His face looked like a rat," was the shaky answer.

Lily dissolved into sobs again and Harry held her tightly, giving her as much love and comfort as he could. Not for the first time he cursed how little he knew of his family history. He had looked through all the records he could find and as far as he knew, none of the Potters were Seers, and his mother was Muggle-born so there were no Seers in her family either. Yet this nightmare didn't sound like just a nightmare.

Harry had very carefully kept all his children away from Ron and didn't mention him around them. He was at a loss to explain how Lily could have heard that name; everyone that visited the house knew not to mention him to the kids. For Molly and Arthur, whom Harry was still on good terms with, as well as Fred, George, Bill and Charlie, this was hard but they had done so.

He had a pretty good idea of who the second man was though, the only Death Eater still at large that looked like a rat was Wormtail, who, much to Harry's disgust, had managed to evade capture for a number of years. Harry had once bitterly joked about rounding up every rat exterminator in the country and getting them to hunt for him.

"Hey Lily do you want to stay with me for a while, until you go to sleep again?" he asked. The only response was an up and down motion of the small brown haired head tucked into his shoulder so Harry arranged her comfortably on his lap and cast a localized silencing charm round her. This ensured that he could still talk to Hermione and Draco without disturbing her. It was a running joke in the Potter family that Harry's sons had inherited his hair and their mother's eyes, while Lily had inherited her mother's hair and his eyes.

"So what happened?" Draco enquired.

Harry frowned. "Hermione, you don't happen to know if anyone's mentioned Ron to any of the kids do you?"

Hermione frowned back. "No I don't. I certainly haven't, and I know Fred and George wouldn't have either. Why?"

Harry explained the dream/nightmare and both Hermione and Draco frowned, considering the information. "Do you want me to assign an Auror protective detail to the house?" Draco asked.

Harry shook his head. "No. My team knows who I really am, if I explain the situation then they'll have one of them here with Hermione and the kids all the time. Between two Unspeakables, Ron shouldn't have a chance to hurt them. It's just rather shocking though."

"Do you think she's a Seer?" Hermione asked quietly.

Harry looked up. "I don't know. If she is though then you'll have to suspend your disbelief of the subject. Lily will pick up on your dislike of it and think that it's her that you don't like. She's still a bit young yet to completely understand the concept that dislike of her actions doesn't equal dislike of her although she is learning it."

Hermione glared at Harry. "I know that, I just want to know if she is or not and what sort of strength the gift is at if she is a Seer."

Harry shook his head. "I don't know love. I don't think there's a test for this sort of thing. Given that it's the first time it's occurred though, let's wait and see. I won't let anything happen to you or the kids, I promise."

Hermione kissed him, knowing that he would keep his promise, and went up to check on the twins. Being four-year-olds, they had a habit

of bouncing out of bed, meaning that they got up several times a night before they actually went to sleep. This time though, both twins were fast asleep. Lily had fallen asleep downstairs, still curled up on Harry's lap, safely held by one arm. He had also fallen into a light doze so the scene which Hermione was greeted with when she returned made her reach for the camera. Harry was curled up in the chair, his head bent over Lily's, and both of them had their eyes closed.

Harry woke at the small flash of the camera and blinked, realizing what Hermione had done. Looking down at his daughter he thought of the picture they would have presented and smiled. Shifting his position, he rose from the chair and carried Lily upstairs, tucking her into her bed, hoping that whatever the dream had been, it would not return that night.

"Ready for bed love?" he asked. Hermione nodded and turned to go to the master bedroom. She stopped and frowned, looking outside to the front garden. Harry looked too and shook his head. "You go Mione, I'll find out what Draco is doing," he murmured.

Walking outside he cast a mild warming charm as the air was getting quite cool. "What are you doing Draco?" he asked.

His friend looked up and smiled grimly at him. "Not leaving your family's safety to chance. I've put an alarm ward round the perimeter, if any hostile spells are cast here, myself and my best team will be here in seconds. I'm not letting you do this yourself."

Harry merely looked at him. "I appreciate it Draco, but what if you're not there when the alarms go off?" he asked quietly.

Draco glared at him. "I'll tell the whole Auror department that there's a possible threat leveled against you and your family, and what the alarms mean. Even if I'm not there, the on-duty team will respond. Between the Aurors and you and your team no attacker would stand

a chance."

"True" Harry replied, feeling the unconscious tension inside him which had been present since Lily's dream easing somewhat. He smiled at Draco. "Thanks mate," he said softly.

Draco shrugged. "No problem. I'd hate to lose my best sparring partner after all."

Harry snorted. "Yeah right. I could wipe the floor with you any day of the week."

"Oh yeah?" Draco fired back.

Harry chuckled and shook his head. "Lets get back inside, it's getting cold. Thanks for the ward."

Draco smirked at him. "Don't mention it. Now, I hear you've instigated a little game between you and the kids known as Lion Hunting. Care to elaborate?"

They walked back inside, chuckling as Harry related details of the game. Neither noticed the silent watcher lying almost hidden in the tall grass in the field opposite Marauder Mansion. The watcher's eyes narrowed before he got up and Disapparated with a small pop. He would return.

Author Note

Hello everyone. I know my profile says that this story won't be posted until it's complete and it's nowhere near complete yet, but I thought I'd start posting it anyway. I have been having terrible trouble with the epilogue for Dark Apprentice, both because of lack of writing inspiration for it and also real life interfering. My original fic which I'm also working on is well underway, the first book is complete and undergoing the final edit and polish while I wait for inspiration to

strike with regard to its title and the second book is started. Hopefully you like this story, if not, well, there are plenty of others to read. Don't bother flaming if you don't like it. Constructive criticism on the other hand is always welcome.

May the Force be with you

Padawan Lynne

Chapter Two: Talks and Tragedy

Harry walked into the Auror training facilities at half past three in the afternoon, two days after Draco's visit. He was cloaked in his normal robes, not wearing his Unspeakable ones. He needed to be Harry Potter today, not Unspeakable Hunter.

"Harry how are you?" Draco called out, walking over to meet him.

Harry shook his hand and replied, "Fine Draco, just fine. Now, where are these recruits that I'm supposed to be terrifying?"

"That's lecturing, Harry, not terrifying" Draco said in mock reproof. Harry smirked once more before making his way up to the front and leaning on the desk. He looked out at the group of Aurors and smiled, it was sometimes painful to talk about Voldemort but this time he was feeling no pain, only anticipation.

"Right then. Who here knows anything about Voldemort?" he asked. The group flinched and Harry frowned. "The first thing we're going to get rid of right now because I'm sick and tired of it, is that flinching at his name. Honestly everyone, he's dead and buried. Actually no, he's dead and turned into tiny little pieces. He's not coming back and that stupid name he gave himself was only an anagram anyway."

"Anagram?" one of the Aurors asked.

Harry snorted. "Yes an anagram. It means that he mixed up the letters in his name to get the one he gave himself."

"How?" another one asked.

Harry smiled. "Come up here Auror – uh, what's your name?" he asked. The Auror blushed at being singled out but got up. "Auror Richards Mr Potter. What do you want me to do?"

"Do you know how to write words in the air with your wand?"

"Yes. What do you want me to write?"

Harry was starting to enjoy this. "Write the name Tom Marvolo Riddle in the air for me would you." Auror Richards did so and Harry looked at the floating letters for a minute.

"Tom Marvolo Riddle. He was a half blood, an orphan, and considered Hogwarts his home. He was a Slytherin and Head Boy, a brilliant student. But when he sank into the Dark Arts he fashioned himself a new name. Waving his own wand the letters rearranged themselves until they spelled out "I am Lord Voldemort."

Staring at the group Harry remarked, "Clever trick huh. He didn't let any of his followers know of his half blood status or they never would have followed him. He was apparently a charming and charismatic leader before he went insane."

"How did you beat him though?" the Unspeakable trainee who had been asked to sit in on the lecture enquired. Harry glared at him.

"Voldemort," he began, and this time the majority tried very hard to stop flinching, "was so steeped in Dark Arts that he'd forgotten the good parts of himself. He'd never known love so he underestimated its power. Because of his arrogance and overconfidence, and my belief in a power that I too hadn't had a lot of experience with, I was able to beat him."

"So you loved him to death? Never thought you were gay, Potter," the Unspeakable remarked.

Harry's eyes flared briefly with anger, seemingly almost lit from behind with power that none of the cadets had seen before. "Watch your mouth Pritchard. I understand you think you can beat me in a duel. You'll get your chance at me later on, for now, keep your mouth

shut."

As the Unspeakable slouched in his chair, less confident than he had been, Harry reined in his annoyance and returned to the lecture. "I did not, as Unspeakable Pritchard would have you believe, "love" him to death. Love for my friends, love for my family, gave me the determination to carry on, to beat him for good. Love was a foreign concept for him and he couldn't stand to be around it. I just used all the power that it gave me to overload his system and he died, I believe, of catastrophic heart failure."

"You gave the old snake a heart attack?" Draco questioned. Harry grinned.

"Essentially, yes. After I and the rest of the army that we assembled at Hogwarts decimated his army, it was just him and me. Any of his followers still alive had Apparated away, or used Portkeys. He was at almost full strength, even though the loss of his followers drained some of his magic. We faced each other and we dueled. He was throwing curses I had no idea how to counter so instead of wasting energy in a magical duel I moved it to a mental one. He and I shared a link through my scar so I used that against him."

"How?" Auror Underhill asked. He was rewarded with a slight smile from Harry.

"Voldemort, like I stated earlier, couldn't stand being in the presence of love. Because I was practically filled with it, thanks to my mother using her magic to cast an ancient protection spell over me just as she died, he couldn't stand to be in my mind for very long. I just pushed a whole lot of magic down the link, infused with as much love as I could manage. He died almost instantaneously.

As the Aurors whispered about this, Harry had a drink of water from the glass that Draco had left on the desk for him. Finally one of the Aurors asked "So, can we have a duel against you?"

Harry smirked. "Just to make it interesting, what about all of you against me?"

The Aurors smirked but Pritchard looked disappointed. "I want to duel you on my own Potter!" he snapped. The Aurors looked at him as though he were crazy.

"Come off it, he's too powerful for you to handle alone!" an Auror named Wickham said derisively. Pritchard flushed in embarrassment and anger but snapped back, "I can take him, he can't be that powerful, even if he did defeat You-Know-Who."

Pritchard then found himself the victim of several well placed curses and hexes then as the Aurors didn't appreciate his slandering Harry. Harry himself merely stood and watched. When the curses had been reversed he straightened up and said in a cool tone of voice, "Very well Mr Pritchard, whenever you're ready."

He stood on one side of a dueling ring, with Pritchard on the other. None of the Aurors were betting on who would win, they were instead, betting on how fast Harry would win the match.

"Now you both know the rules, anything except the Unforgivables," Draco was saying but Harry held up a hand. "Director, I know that Unspeakables are taught the use of the Unforgivables. Just to spice things up, how about we say nothing except Avada Kedavra?"

Draco looked perplexed but looked at Pritchard, who sneered at Harry and said, "That's fine by me." Shrugging, Draco agreed, and got the Auror mediwizard on standby in case he was needed. Then he gave the signal to begin and promptly dived out of the way.

Pritchard went first. He started, very predictably, with a disarming charm.

"Expelliarmus!" he shouted.

Harry rolled his eyes and stepped to the side. "Missed," he called out. He then sent a rapid series of spells in Pritchard's direction, all low level jinxes and curses, but all designed to irritate and annoy his opponent.

Pritchard was getting furious and upped the ante. "Crucio!" he snarled. Harry let the spell hit him and then raised his eyebrows as he threw it off. He'd endured far worse from Voldemort after all. "Was that a Cruciatus or a Tickling charm Pritchard?" he enquired before sending a Jelly-Legs jinx at the arrogant Unspeakable.

The duel had lasted for five minutes, with Harry not really doing much but sidestepping most spells, shielding against others and taunting his opponent. In between all this he kept up a running commentary to the watching Aurors.

"You see how he's getting more and more frustrated, and as that happens his concentration slips and his spells become less accurate and more erratic," he said as he slid out of the path of a Knee Reversal hex. He cast a bone removing charm at Pritchard's arm in response. It hit the wrong one but it distracted the arrogant idiot long enough for Harry to casually disarm him.

"Now that that's over with do you want to say something Pritchard?" he enquired, giving the young trainee back his wand.

Pritchard snarled at him. "Yeah I want to say something Potter! Avada Kedavra!"

Harry had dropped to the ground as he heard the first syllables come out of his opponent's mouth. Growling he snarled out the first spell that came to mind.

"Alopecia!"

Pritchard let out a scream that didn't sound remotely human at all as every hair on his body was suddenly ripped out by the roots. It was a variation of the shaving charm that witches used to remove unwanted body hair, only Harry had removed the numbing and localizing parts of the spell which would have chosen a specific area and numbed it so there was no pain.

Some of the Aurors were looking at Harry in fascination and some were staring at Pritchard in shock. "Well, let's hope my partner doesn't catch wind of this, or you could start a trend Potter," Wickham muttered, staring at the completely bald Unspeakable trainee. "Um, is he hairless, you know, all over?"

Harry nodded. "Yep, and it won't grow back for a while either. Do you all want to duel me now? I promise not to use that charm on you unless you try to kill me." He grinned at the end of this sentence to show he was joking. Even so, the Aurors were suddenly remarkably unsure about dueling him. Harry shrugged and walked over to Draco.

"Let the Unspeakables deal with him Draco, once he finds out who my alter ego is he'll probably faint or something like that. You were right though, this was an entertaining afternoon. Thanks."

Draco grinned. "It was for me too. I wonder, if we released news of what you did to the general public, how many bald wizards we'd be seeing a few days from now?"

Harry chuckled, which soon grew to all out laughter. "Quite a few I'd imagine," he gasped. Growing serious, he asked quietly, "Did you explain about that security alarm round the house?"

Draco nodded. "Yes Harry, we'll be ready for anything. Do you have to get home right away or not?"

Harry nodded ruefully. "Yes I do, I promised the kids a "lion hunt" this morning but we got sidetracked so I postponed it till this afternoon. If I don't go home now they'll be cranky and cranky kids are something I don't feel up to dealing with today."

Draco chuckled. "Go on home then and have fun."

Harry waved before apparating home. He found Sirius, Daniel and Lily all looking mutinous and sitting on the couch, stuck there with sticking charms. Raising an eyebrow he looked at Hermione.

"They weren't staying still so I stuck them there, that way I could keep an eye on them until you got home," Hermione said by way of explanation. Harry shrugged and released the three kids from the charms. "Ready for a lion hunt?" he asked.

They cheered up remarkably quickly and soon were bouncing all over the place. Hermione rolled her eyes and Harry chuckled. "Too much sugar?" he asked. Hermione nodded ruefully. Shaking his head Harry transformed into his lion form. He was a dual animagus, with his lion form nicknamed Leo and his wolf form nicknamed Shadow. Both animals had given rise to his Unspeakable nickname, as they were both predators.

Leo shook his head and roared a challenge to the three young "hunters" before leaping away and out into the front garden. While he was leading the three on a merry chase round the front lawn, the Floo chimed and Hermione opened it, letting Minerva McGonagall through.

"Hermione dear how are you?" the older witch said with a smile, jumping a bit as a roar was heard outside. "Lion hunt again?" she queried. Hermione nodded with a wide smile. "They never get tired of it, and neither does Harry I think. When they were learning to crawl, he'd transform and let them chase his tail. He was less amused when they used it as a chew toy when they were teething."

She showed Minerva a photo of Leo with as shocked an expression as a lion can have on his face as one of his "cubs" chewed on his tail. Minerva laughed and copied the photo. "I'll put this on my dresser I think, it's so cute." Hermione giggled. The two witches were soon treated to the sight of Daniel and Sirius dragging Leo in by the mane while Lily had hold of his tail and was pulling on that too. Leo himself was walking rather quickly to alleviate the pulling sensations.

Lying down near Minerva he sighed, but apparently the game wasn't over. "Mummy, didn't you say that Daddy needed a haircut?" Lily asked innocently.

Hermione and Minerva shared a wicked smirk and then Hermione nodded. "Yes dear, I did. Go and get the scissors. Remember how to hold them, carefully, yes that's right. Now, I'll do the cutting but you tell me where."

Leo tried to get up but found himself pinned to the floor by his children. Struggling brought him nothing but extra pressure on his limbs so he submitted to having his mane cut, although it was plain to see what he thought of it all as his tail lashed around repeatedly and he kept making growling noises which translated to general grumbling in human terms.

It was not helped by the fact that Minerva kept taking photos of the event and when Hermione was done, Leo's mane was more shaped, a bit shorter, and more layered. Shaking his head the massive cat got to his feet and padded over to a mirror. Apparently liking the result he turned and gave everyone a huge lick before changing back into his human form.

"Hello Minerva, how are you?" Harry said with a smile. The haircut he'd had as a lion had stayed with him in human form, and now his normally messy hair was shorter and neater.

"I'm fine Harry. I must say, that's the first time I've ever seen a lion get a haircut. What next, walking a wolf on a leash?" she teased. Harry chuckled.

"Maybe. It's just fun though, playing with them like this. How are the plans for the new school year going?"

Minerva sighed. "Some problems but nothing we can't sort out. Dumbledore has stepped down as Headmaster, did you know?"

"No. I suppose it makes sense though. Are you going to be the Headmistress then?" Seeing Minerva's nod Harry smiled. "That's brilliant. Congratulations."

"Thank you Harry but I'm starting to wonder how Albus did it all. There's so much paperwork to do. Even more than when I was just a teacher."

Harry snorted. "Why do you think I resisted Dumbledore's attempts to get me to teach DADA all this time? I don't like paperwork, even the amount we have to do at work makes me antsy. I prefer action, not reports."

"Yes love we know," Hermione interjected, kissing him. They broke apart when Daniel commented, "Eww, Mum and Dad are kissing."

"It's not eww Daniel, when you grow up and find yourself a nice witch, you'll discover that it's very nice. What are you three up to now?" Harry asked, as all three had been quiet for some time. Daniel shrugged.

"Not much, just want to stay in here with you."

Harry and Hermione exchanged a glance but shrugged. It wasn't unusual for the kids to want to spend quiet time with their parents, especially after being tired out by a game. Hermione shifted further

down the couch, allowing the kids to climb up between them and snuggle into one parent or the other.

"Will you stay for tea Minerva?" Hermione asked. Minerva nodded.

"Yes I'd like that. It's been a while since I've had tea with you."

After tea, the small group was quietly relaxing in the sitting room and discussing what the three youngest Potters had been up to lately when their quiet time was rudely interrupted by the sound of the perimeter alarms going off. Harry leapt to his feet, drawing his wand as his Unspeakable team plus the on-duty team of Aurors Apparated into the house.

"Spread out, we don't want anyone getting in here!" Harry snapped. The Aurors obeyed him because it was his house, while his team was used to following his orders. "Hey hang on a minute, Potter, you're an Unspeakable aren't you?" one of the Aurors asked.

Exasperated, Harry snarled, "Yes I am, if you hadn't guessed it yet I'm Hunter. I don't want that being made public either understand?!"

The Auror gulped and nodded before spreading out with his team mates to defend the house. Harry spun round to check where his family was and growled at seeing Hermione standing at the entrance to the hall, their children standing around her.

"Hermione, take the emergency Portkey out of here!" he snapped.

Hermione shook her head. "I tried. There are anti-Portkey wards – it won't work. There are also anti-Apparition wards and the Floo's blocked. We're trapped."

Harry growled at this information, but couldn't do anything short of tearing down the wards, and that would take time – time he didn't have. "Fine then. Take the kids and go upstairs. Minerva go with

them. There will be Aurors up there as well but I want you to protect our kids if any intruders should make it past us. I don't care if you transfigure them into furniture to do that, just make sure they're protected. Go, now!"

Hermione and Minerva retreated up the stairs, but the kids ran to Harry. He knelt, pulling them into a hug. "Go with your mother, Aunt Minerva will help her protect you. Stay very quiet OK."

The children nodded sniffing a little. "Love you Dad," they said in chorus.

Harry hugged them a bit tighter. "I love you too. Now go, quickly." The kids ran for the stairs and were soon in Lily's bedroom with Hermione and Minerva, who were busy casting shields on the door. Hermione hugged them tightly, praying that their family would survive this battle.

"What's going on Mummy?" Lily questioned. Daniel and Sirius were hugging each other and looking scared as well.

"Some men are trying to get inside but your Dad and his friends won't let them hurt us," Hermione reassured them. Inside, she was less reassured. She knew that Harry would do his best to protect them but what happened if it was all the as yet uncaptured Death Eaters out there? Sighing, she erected a powerful shield over the doorway, as an addition to the ones already there. The two adults settled down to wait out the fight downstairs, their wands out and trained on the doorway. Beyond the shielded doorway they could see four Aurors spread out along the hallway, their wands trained on the staircase, ready for any intruders that got past Harry and his team downstairs.

Downstairs the rest of the Aurors and Unspeakables were spread out, awaiting the arrival of the intruders. They had used the time to erect a series of wards and various spells to slow the invaders down a bit. There was quiet, and then the front door was suddenly blown

inwards. As the defenders ducked to avoid shards of wood, Harry glared at the space and muttered, "Waste of a perfectly good door that was."

Hermione's suspicion had been right. Ron Weasley and Peter Pettigrew walked through the front door, firing curses and hexes left, right and centre, followed by Nott, Avery, Macnair, and several more that Harry didn't recognise, who were the last surviving Death Eaters from the war. Ron wasn't a Death Eater but he had apparently allied with them in an effort to get Harry.

Harry growled under his breath and yelled, "ATTACK!"

The Aurors and Unspeakables unleashed a hail of curses, hexes and jinxes on the invaders. Harry was amused to see the Aurors use the Alopecia charm, which made a couple of the Death Eaters pause in shock. Ron strode through the debris, searching for Harry. All spells that were aimed at him seemed to swerve away at the last minute, causing Harry to suspect that there was some type of redirection shield around him.

"Hello, Potter," Ron snarled, his face a mask of rage. The battle abruptly stopped as everyone wanted to see what would happen with the two friends-turned-enemies.

Harry glared at him. "Hello Ron. Allied yourself with wanted criminals have you? I didn't think you were brave enough to do that. It carries an Azkaban sentence didn't you know?"

Ron merely laughed. "I have only one purpose here, Potter. Where are your kids?" he asked. Harry tightened his grip on his wand but said nothing. Ron repeated the question and this time Harry answered.

"Like I'm going to tell you. You're even stupider than I thought you were if you believe that."

He dived out of the way of a killing curse from Pettigrew and threw a nasty organ liquefaction curse back, which hit Macnair in the face. Ron smirked.

"Oh I think you will, and even if you don't I can just look. See, I have something you don't." With that, he fired a powerful explosion curse into the middle of the group of Aurors and Unspeakables.

The defenders closest to the epicenter of the blast were thrown in every direction. Harry heard the sickening cracks of breaking bone, and risked a quick glance in each direction. Most of the Aurors nearest him were dead, their heads bent at grotesque angles, necks obviously broken. His team of Unspeakables was in no better condition, lying on or under bits of broken furniture. Harry felt sick as he saw his second-in-command lying near him, pinned to the floor by a stake of wood through the heart – a piece of wood Harry recognized as being a leg from the hallway table. Looking around, he saw that he was the only one left alive on the ground floor – his team and the Aurors, were all dead from the effects of the explosion. Harry himself was cut up and a bit dizzy but the adrenaline surging through his system was helping to negate the effects enough for him to carry on fighting.

"DADDY!" came a scream from above. Harry looked up to see Ron and Pettigrew as well as the surviving Death Eaters advancing on his terrified sons. With a snarl, Harry leapt up the stairs, crashing into Pettigrew and killing him with a decapitation curse. Then he advanced on Ron, who backed up, losing his confident aura for a moment. Harry looked at Daniel and Sirius and barked, "Back to your mother. Now!"

The boys obeyed as Ron and the Death Eaters threw a series of curses at Harry, who ducked and rolled to avoid them rather than waste energy on shielding. He threw some nasty curses at the Death Eaters, managing to kill half of them and incapacitate the others

enough to remove them from the fight. With the Death Eaters killed or incapacitated, Harry advanced on Ron, and as soon as he was close enough, he let fly with a vicious punch, breaking Ron's nose.

Ron let out a shout of pain and clutched his broken nose, glaring at Harry, who maneuvered round him so that Ron would have to go through Harry in order to reach Harry's family. Terrified squeaks behind him told Harry that at least one of his children was watching the tense stand-off and he flapped a hand behind his back, trying to tell the unseen watcher to get inside their room and close the door. He was wondering why Hermione hadn't had the sense to at least Stun their children and shove them under a bed – he didn't want his children watching this, and he had thought that Hermione would think the same.

Driving Ron back with a series of curses, Harry threw him down the stairs, before risking a quick glance behind him. Lily's bedroom door shut immediately, and Harry felt strong wards go up. He recognized Minerva's and Hermione's magical signatures and smiled grimly before returning his attention to the fight. Noticing one of the incapacitated Death Eaters, whose legs had been pulverized but who was still breathing, reaching for one of his dead comrade's wands, Harry leveled his wand at him and coldly cast the Killing Curse. Seeing that Ron was making his way up the stairs, Harry quickly killed the remaining live Death Eaters and focused his attention on his one remaining enemy.

Ron slowly advanced up the stairs, glaring at Harry hatefully. Harry returned the glare, prepared to lay down his life for his family, but hoping that it wouldn't come to that. He was trying to work out a way of getting through the redirection shield that Ron still had up. He threw Ron down the stairs again, before descending, determined to keep Ron on the bottom level and as far away from his family as possible.

Ron met him with a full body bind charm which Harry impatiently

batted aside. He responded with a blood-freezing spell, hoping to break Ron's shield. His spirits lifted when he noticed the shield flickering, indicating that it was getting low on power. He redoubled his efforts and was shocked when a hail of curses flew from behind him, arcing over his head and shoulders to strike Ron's shield.

Seeing that Ron was distracted, Harry looked over his shoulder. Hermione was crouched at the top of the stairs, Daniel, Sirius and Lily crouched behind her and staring wide-eyed at the battle. Minerva was halfway down the stairs, her wand trained on Ron.

Ron recovered from the triple barrage and realized that his shield was now gone. Snarling, he attacked even harder, throwing Dark curses at the trio of defenders, forcing Minerva back up a few steps. Harry stood firm, refusing to give ground, dispelling the curses that Ron threw at him and throwing a few Dark curses of his own back at his former friend.

The battle lasted a few minutes more before Minerva fell to a cutting curse. Daniel and Sirius cried out in shock as their Aunt Minerva fell down and before Hermione could stop them they'd run down the stairs and were trying to wake her up. Their efforts were to no avail and Harry was now forced to try and defend against Ron's spells while keeping an eye on his sons.

The Aurors who had been upstairs now charged to the top of the landing. The first one to venture down to where Harry was fell to a cutting curse which disemboweled him. The other three advanced on Ron but they died as Ron showed a lethal creativity with his spell casting that Harry hadn't known he had.

Harry snarled and yelled for Hermione to take their children back upstairs. No child should have to witness this. As he was yelling instructions, a Stunning spell slid through his shields and struck him. Hermione watched in horror as Harry slumped to the floor, unconscious. She knew that he was only Stunned and that he would

fight it off soon, but now she had a more important job to do. With Harry unconscious, and Minerva and the rest of the Aurors and Unspeakables dead, she was the only thing standing between Ron and her children.

Determinedly, she shooed them back to Lily's bedroom, where she chivvied them under the bed and warded the space between the bed and floor so they couldn't get out. With that done, she locked the door warding it with the strongest wards she knew, praying that Harry would wake up soon and come to help. While she was praying, she was trying to reassure Lily, Daniel and Sirius who were huddled together under the bed, shaking with fear and silently crying.

Ron looked at Harry's unconscious form and sneered, before stepping over Harry's unconscious body and ascending the stairs slowly. He didn't have to wonder which room held his targets; the strong shields around the door told him which one to look for.

As he prepared to enter, an electric shock threw him backwards. He hit the opposite wall hard, and Hermione smirked as she heard the thud. The smirk died as Ron wasn't deterred by the electrifying experience and began to attack the door and the wall on either side.

Harry was slowly regaining consciousness downstairs. He hated being hit with Stunners; they left him feeling groggy and terrible as he woke up. A scream from upstairs jolted his brain awake and he threw off the effects of the spell, shaking his head to rid it of the last of the woolly feeling.

Another scream galvanized him into action, and he tore up the stairs, praying that he wouldn't be too late. As he ran into Lily's room, he was almost sick. Hermione was dead; the victim of a cutting curse to the neck, and his children had been pulled out of their hiding place. Ron was looking at him triumphantly, holding a knife to Lily's throat while she and her brothers whimpered in fear.

"So Potter, will you risk your precious daughter's life? Her life and the lives of your sons, hinges on your ability to do as you're told. If you don't, well, the last thing you see will be your children dying in front of your eyes and you won't be able to do anything to stop it.

"What do you want Ron?" Harry snarled. His children were looking at him, their eyes filled with fear but also trust. Harry realized that they trusted him to get them out of the mess that they were in, as he'd always done whenever they'd got into a mess that they couldn't get out of.

Ron laughed again. "It's not what I want, Potter, but what my sister wants. You see, when you married Hermione, Ginny was terribly jealous, she wanted you as her husband. So, she and I hatched this plan. If your family was killed, then she could comfort you and worm her way into your heart and eventually be your wife. Hermione was supposed to be mine too but you ruined that for me. I'm sad she had to die but I'm not about to have your leftovers as it were. So the deal is this: You agree to marry Ginny and you can have your children back. Ginny always wanted children and she doesn't particularly care that they're Hermione's either. An adoption potion can take care of that."

"And if I don't agree," Harry asked in a low voice.

Ron smirked. "Then you get to watch as I slit your precious children's throats."

Harry felt sick. Marry someone he didn't love in order to save his children, or refuse, and watch them die. He looked at Lily, and then at Daniel and Sirius, and knew what his choice had to be. "OK fine. I'll marry Ginny" he muttered. He held out his arms for Ron to give the children to him.

The next thing Harry knew, Ron had let out a shriek of pain and dropped the knife from Lily's throat. Looking down, Harry saw two

blurs of movement, as Daniel and Sirius ran out the door, followed quickly by Lily. Ron glared at him and Harry chuckled – Lily had elbowed Ron in his groin as hard as she could. Daniel and Sirius, being the good brothers they were, had seized their chance to escape and had taken her with them.

"Those little brats!" Ron seethed, throwing a curse at Harry in sheer frustration. Harry smiled grimly and reflected it back at him.

"Never underestimate a witch – even a two-year-old one," he said, before following his children out the door. Ron followed, throwing all the curses he could at Harry, who defended against them as much as he could, mindful of the fact that his children were behind him.

His focus was solely on Ron, and as such, he was surprised when he took a step backwards and met nothing but air. Sighing resignedly, he threw a Sectumsempra curse at Ron just before he tumbled backwards down the stairs.

He landed at the bottom in a heap, and was aware of the panicked cries of his children as they crowded around him. Raising his head, he tried to reassure them, but he could tell from their expressions that he wasn't succeeding very well. Even at only four and two, his children knew that what was happening was bad and they had every right to be frightened.

Getting up off the floor was painful – Harry had broken his left wrist in the fall, and cracked a couple of ribs. His breathing was shallow and fast, but he still had to protect his children from the menace that was coming down the stairs.

Ron smiled as he saw that his opponent was obviously injured. Recasting the redirection shield on himself, he advanced towards Harry, who faced him defiantly. "Get out of the house," he said to his children, not wanting them in the line of fire.

"We can't, Dad. Everything's locked," Daniel replied through chattering teeth. Closing his eyes, Harry tested the wards and scowled – his son was right. The wards were still up; preventing any exit by apparition, floo, or portkey, and the hole left by the door had been blocked by debris from the explosion, which was set like concrete. Harry would have to waste precious minutes taking it apart for his children to get out. Even the windows were warded, preventing Harry from simply pushing them out that way.

Ron smirked as he advanced on the decreased family. "Oh, dear, Harry, it would appear that you're trapped. As for your answer about Ginny, I'm afraid I lied. Ginny doesn't want any children from other women interfering in her marriage." He threw a Sectumsempra curse at Harry, who dodged it, but that dodge had inadvertently exposed his children. Stumbling over a piece of debris, he heard a frightened cry which was abruptly cut off. A flash of green light filled his vision and he heard a soft thump immediately afterwards. Shaking his head to clear it, he saw Daniel on the floor, unmoving. Swallowing hard, he crawled over to the small body, which Sirius was shaking with increasing hysteria.

"Dad, why won't he wake up?" Sirius asked, tears running down his face.

Harry wasn't able to answer – he just cradled Sirius in his arms while he glared at Ron. Seeing the wand aimed at him, Harry rolled to the side, taking Sirius with him and away from the Killing Curse that had been thrown at them. Sirius let out a small cry as he was momentarily squashed by his father's body before Harry rolled off him. "Let Sirius and Lily go, Ron," Harry yelled. He summoned all the hatred and anger he could, and threw a Killing Curse at his former friend.

Ron saw the deadly green light heading for him and hurriedly moved out of the way. Spotting Lily hiding behind the remains of the couch, he summoned her to him with a spell.

"Come out, Harry, or your daughter dies," he yelled.

Harry cautiously rose from his hiding place, Sirius peering out from behind his back. As Harry took a few steps towards Ron and Lily, Sirius, blinking back tears, only saw one thing. His sister was being threatened by the person who killed his brother.

Without bothering to consult anyone, the four-year-old wizard ran straight towards Ron, evading the arms of his father, who was desperately trying to reach him. Sirius saw the wand aimed at him and dived, sliding along the floor on his stomach. Getting up right in front of Ron, he did the only thing he could think of.

Ron let out a yelp as he felt small teeth fasten into his leg. Looking down, he smacked Sirius away from him, dodged the Stunner cast by Harry, threw a cutting curse back at him, and then threw the same curse at Sirius, who couldn't evade it in time.

Harry let out a hoarse cry as Sirius died, but as Ron was holding a knife to Lily's throat, he didn't dare try the same type of assault as his son. He moved cautiously towards Ron, who pressed the knife harder into Lily's throat.

"Don't be foolish, Harry," Ron taunted. Harry glared at him, trembling with rage.

"Let her go, Ron. If our friendship meant anything to you, please, let her go," he pleaded.

Ron thought about it. "No," he said coldly, before casually slitting Lily's throat and shoving the dying child into her father's arms. He concentrated hard, trying to Apparate away. He looked startled when he couldn't, and ran for the front door, to find that blocked as well. He was trapped in Marauder Manor, with no way out, caught in his own trap and at the mercy of the one whose family he'd just killed.

Harry ignored Ron's attempts to escape, knowing that he couldn't get through the wards, or out the door or windows. He caught Lily as she stumbled into his arms and knelt down. Silent tears streamed down his face as she died before he could even begin to heal her.

Looking round at the room, he saw Sirius and Daniel's bodies, lying on the floor among the dead Unspeakables and Aurors. Swallowing his grief, he put their bodies next to Lily's, and went upstairs to examine Lily's bedroom, where Hermione had died defending their children. Grief threatened to overwhelm him as he slowly ascended the stairs, his injured wrist and ribs crying out in protest at each movement, but he buried both the grief and the physical pain, letting his investigative instincts take over so he could examine the bedroom as he'd been trained to do.

The shields around the door had been overloaded by too many spells being shot at it. Once they had been taken down, Ron had been allowed entry into the room. Harry collapsed once more, almost choking on the amount of grief and pain he was feeling. Soon though, the grief turned to anger. The hate he had felt earlier was now a white hot flame. He controlled it – it wouldn't do to become like Voldemort. He would have revenge on both Ron and Ginny for this but he refused to become a Dark Lord over it. Hermione wouldn't have wanted that, and neither would Minerva.

Walking down the stairs he saw that Ron was still trying to escape and he smirked coldly. He aimed his wand at the trapped murderer and hissed, "Tormentia!"

The Tormentia curse was sometimes called the weaker version of the Cruciatus but it wasn't illegal as it didn't cause people to go insane as the Cruciatus did. Harry watched with a cruel smirk as Ron screamed and thrashed on the floor, before ending the curse.

"Did you like that?" he hissed, casting the curse again. Ron was screaming so loudly he couldn't answer. Realising this, Harry ended

the curse again and then thought for a moment. Smirking coldly, he hung Ron upside down from the ceiling and conjured spiders to run all over him. Leaving Ron screaming once more, this time because his worst fear was crawling all over him, Harry went to the fireplace.

One Floo call later and a magical forensics team entered Marauder Manor along with Tonks, Kingsley, Draco, and Harry's boss, the Head Unspeakable, known as Croaker. They heard an anguished roar coming from the sitting room, followed by a mournful howl as Harry had changed from Leo to Shadow, finding the wolf's howl a more appropriate method of expressing what he was feeling.

The Aurors, Draco and Croaker found Harry in the sitting room, curled up in front of the fire, still in his wolf form. He looked up at them, his eyes shining with grief. The Floo roared to life and Severus Snape stepped through, unaware of the situation, so he was startled to find several wands pointed at him. The wands were lowered as soon as they realized who he was though.

Harry transformed back and looked at Croaker rather helplessly. His boss wrapped a blanket round him and pushed him down on the couch. "What happened Hunter?" he asked. Snape was looking around the room in shock. He'd been invited for a chat and walked into what looked like a bloodbath. Spotting Harry he walked over and sat next to him, staying silent so he could learn what had happened.

Harry made an inarticulate growling noise and replied, "Look around the house. Pay particular attention to the room we're in. Then come back and ask me what the fuck happened!" He became aware of an arm round his shoulders and he leaned into the other person, not caring who it was, but needing the comfort. Snape just tightened his hold, recognizing that his former student was in shock and needed someone to hold on to, even if he didn't realize who it was.

Fawkes landed on Harry's shoulder and began to sing but not even the phoenix could help ease the burden of grief that he was carrying

at the moment. Draco, Croaker and the Aurors went upstairs and looked around, and then looked around downstairs. When they came back they looked extremely sympathetic.

"Who did this Harry?" Tonks asked softly.

Harry turned red-rimmed eyes to him and hissed out "Well it certainly wasn't me! Macnair, Pettigrew, Nott and Avery, and the other free Death Eaters were accompanied here by Ron Weasley. The Death Eaters threw an explosion hex at us, killing my team and the Aurors. Ron, Pettigrew, and the Death Eaters who survived our initial assault on them then went upstairs. I killed Pettigrew and the Death Eaters and threw Ron down the stairs. The Aurors came to help me kill him and died as a result.

Ron was the one who killed Hermione, Minerva, and my children. He tried to get me to agree to marry his sister in exchange for my daughter's life and then when I agreed he killed her anyway. I want him dead and I want him to die in the slowest, most painful way possible!"

Harry had got up and began pacing round, his magic flaring at random intervals. Draco walked with him. "It's alright to grieve, Harry, but don't allow your grief to drive you to do things that aren't in your nature."

Harry spun round with a snarl. "YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT I'M GOING THROUGH!" he yelled. "DON'T YOU DARE TELL ME WHAT I CAN AND CAN'T DO TO THE BASTARD THAT STOLE MY FAMILY FROM ME!"

Harry continued pacing, growling and casting hate-filled looks at Ron, who was now in custody and wearing a pair of magic-suppressing manacles on his hands. His wand was in Kingsley's grasp and both Aurors were giving Harry sympathetic looks.

"Potter," Croaker said as he was leaving. Harry looked at him. "Take some time off; grieve for your loss, not only of your family but of your team too. You and your team were the best we had, we'll be sorry to lose that."

"You're firing me?" Harry asked.

Croaker shook his head. "No but you won't feel like being a leader at the moment will you?"

Harry shook his head this time. "No I won't. What time do you want me to come back?"

"Whenever you're ready Potter, whenever you're ready. We won't put a time frame on recovery from something like this. Just hang in there OK."

Harry nodded. Now that he was a bit calmer, Fawkes' song was having more of an effect on him. "Is there anything that I could do to stop this from happening again?" he asked.

Snape spoke for the first time since he'd entered the house. "Like time travel, Harry?" He shook his head. "The answer is no I'm afraid. The reason you could do in your third year to save your godfather was the fact that he wasn't already dead. Going back to the fight now wouldn't help, as everyone would know that you were supposed to be downstairs. And what if Ron killed you and the past you came in to see your dead body on the floor? I'm afraid that this is something you'll just have to accept that you can't change. I'm truly sorry."

Harry shook his head. "No. I'm not about to accept it. There has to be some way to fix it!" Severus shook his head as he watched Harry pacing around, discarding idea after idea as he thought of them. Finally he sank down onto a couch.

"OK. There is no grand idea. You're right. What's going to become of

Ron and Ginny?" he asked with a slight snarl.

Kingsley answered, frowning as he did so. "They will be charged and it is likely that Ronald will be given the Dementor's Kiss. His sister will most likely spend the rest of her life in Azkaban. Is that satisfactory?"

"Only if they're in maximum security with Dementors around them every second of every day!" Harry growled.

Kingsley shrugged. "It won't make a difference with Ronald but it might with Miss Weasley. We'll have to see. Will you be alright here, with food and everything?"

Harry looked up at him. "Yes" he answered dully. "I'll be fine. I'm used to being alone." He turned to Severus, and said, "You'll need to inform the staff that a new Headmaster or Headmistress will need to be chosen."

Severus nodded and left, casting one last sympathetic look back at his former student. Draco hugged Harry tightly and left as well, to personally oversee the paperwork that needed to be done.

The funeral was held a couple of days later. Most of the old DA had come to pay their respects, as had a lot of former students of Minerva's. Most of the DA didn't know what to say to Harry so they just said they were sorry. Harry himself was in a sort of numb state, half believing that all of the deceased were going to wake up and yell "SURPRISE!" As the mourners were leaving the small church, a group of them split off and headed for Harry.

"Harry, we're so sorry," Molly Weasley said, tears running down her face. Arthur put an arm round his shoulders, trying to offer some comfort. Harry allowed it briefly before moving out of reach. He took in the group of redheads and noticed immediately that two were missing.

"Where's Ron and Ginny?" he asked, keeping his tone neutral.

Molly and Arthur winced and Harry noticed a distinctly ugly look cross Fred and George's faces. "The Aurors arrested Ginny last night, on a charge of conspiracy to murder. They also said that Ron had been arrested on charges of murder and allying with wanted fugitives. They didn't say who they were supposed to have murdered though," Bill replied in as neutral a tone as Harry's.

Harry's eyes narrowed. "The people they murdered, or in Ginny's case, conspired to murder, are lying in those coffins behind you. Ron killed my children after trying to use them to force me to marry Ginny. He slit Lily's throat in front of me."

The Weasleys went dead white at Harry's flat statement, and Arthur closed his eyes, seeming to slump in defeat. "I'm truly sorry Harry, we had no idea they were planning this. How did they get around what I heard was a rather lethal defence though?"

Harry glared at Bill. "Ron threw a powerful Explosion Curse at us, killing all my team and the Aurors who were downstairs. He had a Redirection Shield on him, which made any spell cast at him ineffective – even transfiguration ones. Care to guess where he learnt that spell?"

He turned and looked at the coffins for a minute before turning back to the ashen faced Weasleys. "The only reason I'm not declaring a blood feud against your family is that I happen to like you. The only members I have issues with are your two youngest, who I sincerely hope rot in hell for what they've done. Now if you'll excuse me I need to speak to Hermione's parents.

He walked off and the Weasleys were left staring at each other. Bill was white with both shock and anger. "I'll kill the little bastard," he snarled. "He told me he wanted to be a curse-breaker and that is one of the standard spells we have to use, to avoid ancient spells or

spells from tomb-raiders. I can't believe he'd use it for this." He shook his head, looking utterly sick.

Arthur put a sympathetic hand on his eldest son's shoulder. "It wasn't your fault Bill, and Harry knows that. He's angry and hurt over the loss of his family, as he has every right to be, but he's not irrational. Ron and Ginny will face the full force of the law for this; I think Harry is requesting the Dementor's Kiss for Ronald while Ginny will be spending the rest of her life with Dementors outside her cell nearly all the time in Azkaban. We can do nothing except offer what support Harry will accept from us at this time. We should be grateful he still considers us friends; he would be well within his rights if he chose not to.

Shaking their heads, the Weasleys made their way home as Harry talked with the Grangers, both of whom assured Harry that they didn't blame him in the least. Neville also offered his condolences along with Draco and Snape.

"Harry," Draco began.

Harry turned round to find Draco and Snape standing in front of him. "Yes," he said cautiously. Both held out their hands and Harry shook them.

"We're very sorry, Harry, no one deserves to have this happen to them," Snape said quietly. Harry stared into the eyes of his former most hated teacher, who had become his mentor in his seventh year at Hogwarts and found only sympathy. He nodded curtly.

"They will reap what they've sown," he said tonelessly. Hugging himself he added viciously, "but I wish I could send Ron insane before the Dementors get him!"

"Not Ginevra?" Draco asked. Harry looked at him and shook his head.

"No. You know the hell Sirius gave me for that Ministry fiasco in fifth year when I cursed Bellatrix Lestrange. He told me that even though she was a heartless bitch I shouldn't have cursed her because she was running away from me at the time, and then he grounded me for the entire summer between my fifth and sixth years for using an Unforgivable. Besides, if I went after Ginny now, it would only end with me in a cell in Azkaban right next to her, and I won't give her the satisfaction of ruining my life like that."

The two Slytherins nodded before shaking his hand once more and leaving Harry alone with his thoughts.

Later that night, Harry woke up to a flash of flame on his bed. Fawkes was sitting on his lap, staring at him. "Fawkes," he murmured, "what are you doing here?" The phoenix stared at him and chirped slightly, running his beak through Harry's hair. Harry then felt a warm glow surround him and suddenly he could hear Fawkes' voice in his head.

"I know you want to save your family, Harry, but this is not possible. Not at this time. You need to save your whole family. Voldemort was never supposed to rise like this but you defeated him anyway."

"What do you mean, save my whole family, no time turner goes back in years," Harry questioned.

Fawkes gave the phoenix equivalent of a chuckle. "Harry, Voldemort was supposed to die when he first encountered you. The prophecy would have been fulfilled that night, he marked you as his equal and then you killed him. It would have been over with; he could never have risen again. Thanks to his soul pieces he lived. I want you to go back and destroy the soul pieces before he can use them to survive when he shouldn't have."

"You want me to go back in time and destroy Voldemort's Horcruxes before Halloween nineteen-eighty-one?" Harry asked.

Fawkes trilled at him. "Yes. There is a price though. I can send you back, but I cannot bring you forward again. This is a chance to get to know your family, and to change the future for the better. Many things happened that shouldn't have happened. You can change this. While you're there, let yourself heal and learn to love again."

"What about Dumbledore? You know I don't trust him, I hate him even. Why are you still helping me?" he asked, waiting for an answer while he hurriedly dressed and packed a trunk, shrinking it and putting it in his pocket. Into it had gone all his emergency cash, amounting to several thousand galleons, his ordinary clothes, his Unspeakable robes, underwear, shoes, socks, his broom, several books, and pictures of his family. His wand was in its normal holster on his arm and he lengthened his hair and changed his eye color to gold, anchoring both with a charm that couldn't be dispelled except by him as it was in Parseltongue. His scar was hidden by Muggle make-up, kept on by a sticking charm that was anchored with a Parseltongue spell as well so it would never show unless he wished it to. There wasn't time to go to Gringott's and he wouldn't need the entire Potter fortune in the past anyway, so he didn't worry about that.

Fawkes fluffed his feathers in annoyance as he watched Harry ready himself. "I am helping you, Harry, because despite the fact that I'm bonded to him, Dumbledore treated you very wrongly. As for what you do about the past version of him, just follow your instincts but please don't allow your present feelings about him to cloud your judgment of him in the past."

Harry nodded, and checked to see if he'd missed anything. Finding that he hadn't, he looked at the phoenix with a questioning look in his eyes. "Fawkes, what do I call myself while I'm there?"

Fawkes chirped again and said, "What is the name of the dog star's companion?"

"Orion," Harry breathed. "What will happen to the future as I change things?" Fawkes trilled again, and then flame surrounded them.

"I'm not sure. This is the first time something like this has ever been attempted. The future as you know it now could be overwritten or the people that you meet in the past who are still alive now could gain new memories. I don't know what will happen. Good luck Orion."

That was the last thing Harry heard as he fell through a seemingly endless blackness.

Chapter Three: Familiar Strangers

Harry, or rather, Orion, as he now thought of himself, landed next to the Diagon Alley apparition point with a THUD! As he got up he heard a small snicker from a wizard standing nearby and he glared.

"What! So I collapsed on landing, you try Apparating on a bad leg!" he snapped. He wasn't lying; his leg wasn't fully healed although it could carry his weight easily enough. It had been damaged in the battle and still ached a bit.

Taking a small look at himself in a window he smirked. "Hello Orion Skywalker," he muttered, borrowing his last name from the Star Wars films that Hermione had introduced him to.

He walked up the street, avoiding looking at all the parents with young children as much as he could. The loss of his own family made itself known every time he saw a young child walking with their parents, or saw children trying to cast spells with their parents' wands, or a myriad of other things that young witches and wizards did. He shook his head and turned away from the sight, retreating into Flourish and Blotts.

"Not fond of young children sir?" a voice asked. Orion turned to the speaker, a pretty witch with light green eyes and blonde hair. He shook his head, displaying his now black wedding ring. It had turned black the instant Hermione had died.

"It's not that. My family was murdered a few days ago, I'm still in shock. It just hurts to see what I've lost that's all," he muttered.

The witch nodded, sympathy shining in her eyes. "I'm so sorry sir; I didn't mean to bring up bad memories."

"What memories? For me it's still fresh. I don't honestly know how I keep going on," Orion grumbled. Just then there were shrieks and

screams from outside.

Orion snarled as he leapt out into the street, wand out in an instant. He could sense dark magic easily and knew that even if these wizards weren't Death Eaters he still had to take them down before they killed anyone. His Unspeakable training took over as he took down several of the attacking wizards quickly, rage lending new power to his spells. He looked up the street and for a moment his eyesight blurred. He thought he saw Daniel cowering under a wheelbarrow while one of the wizards advanced on him.

The wizard never got the chance to attack as Orion stepped in between the wizard and his target.

"Leave now and you might live," Orion warned coldly. The wizard merely laughed and sent a bone crushing curse at Orion who blocked it. It was the last spell he ever did as Orion then summoned his heart, giving his opponent an instantaneous heart attack.

With the immediate threats subdued and the Aurors quickly appearing, Orion turned round and crouched down to see who he had saved. He very nearly fell over in shock. There, staring at him with wide hazel eyes was a boy that Orion would cheerfully swear was the young version of his father. This was confirmed when a shout rang down the street.

"JAMES HAROLD POTTER, WHERE ARE YOU!"

James wriggled out of his hiding spot and grabbed Orion's hand. "That's my Dad, I have to tell him you saved me otherwise he might curse you," he said and began dragging the startled Orion down the street.

"DAD, I'M HERE!" James yelled. Up the street Orion saw two people, a witch and wizard start running towards them. The witch, whom Orion assumed was James' mother, hugged him tightly before

starting to scold him for running off and talking to strangers. James' father, meanwhile, was staring suspiciously at Orion.

"And who might you be?" he asked coolly. Orion met his stare evenly and held out his hand. "Orion Skywalker sir, your son was about to be attacked by one of those idiots and I couldn't just stand by and let it happen."

Charles Potter, for that was whom Orion was speaking with, noted the black wedding ring and his eyes softened briefly. "Thank you for saving my son then. I assume you've had experience?" He nodded at the ring.

Orion's eyes flashed with pain. "A few days ago, someone my wife and I once considered a friend came to our house and murdered my family. I wasn't about to let another set of parents go through the pain of losing a child."

Charles nodded and then he was pushed out of the way as his wife grabbed Orion round the middle and hugged him tightly. "Thank you for saving him, thank you so much. You must come to tea, mustn't he dear," she said, shooting a look at her husband.

Charles looked at the young man in front of him and then nodded again, smiling. "You did save James' life; we owe you a life debt for that. Dinner is the least we could offer you unless you have other plans?"

Orion shook his head. "No sir, no other plans. I was just wandering around thinking about looking for a new house actually. My old one has too many painful memories."

Charles patted his shoulder and then led the way to the Apparition point. "I'll Apparate you there seeing as you've never been to our house before. Just hold onto me."

Orion obediently wrapped his arms around his grandfather and held on. A dizzying sensation followed and Orion picked himself up off the carpet as they landed. "I hate Apparition," he muttered. This was greeted by a chuckle from his grandfather.

"I don't believe I've introduced myself. I'm Charles Potter and my wife is Emma. You've already met our son, James. He's eight years old at the moment, starting at Hogwarts in three years."

Orion now knew the year he was in. "So it would be approximately nineteen-sixty-eight then" he murmured to himself. Charles gave him a sharp look, having overheard this bit, but Orion was saved from interrogation when James bounced into the room.

"That was so cool today Orion. When I grow up I want to be able to fight just like you." Orion swallowed hard, mentally shoving back the memory of his own sons saying almost the exact same thing in relation to flying.

"I'm sure you will," he managed to get out.

Charles intervened, seeing that his young guest was not dealing well with having James bouncing round him. "James, I have to talk with Orion, why don't you go outside and practice flying a bit more."

"But Dad, the quaffle broke so I can't practice my shooting," James complained.

Here was something Orion could fix. Rummaging in his pockets he pulled out the training quaffle that he'd slipped in there before he'd left the future and resized it. "Here. I use it at work for stress relief; it's a normal training quaffle, nothing odd about it. Go have fun."

James raced off and Orion abruptly collapsed into a chair. Charles sat down opposite him and fixed him with a penetrating stare. Emma came in at that point and saw the silent stand off.

"Is there something wrong?" she asked. Charles looked up and smiled before returning his gaze to Orion. "Not really but I would like to know what that comment about it being nineteen-sixty-eight is about. You're not wrong but why would you need to confirm the date to yourself?"

Orion sighed. "Do you have any Veritaserum handy? My story will be a tad unbelievable and I'd like for you to believe me."

Charles and Emma exchanged a look before Emma retrieved a vial of the clear-colored truth potion from one of the drawers nearby. Charles also summoned a roll of parchment and a quill. Orion leaned forward, interested. "Are you an Auror? Only I've never seen that outside the Auror or Unspeakable departments of the Ministry."

Charles gave him another sharp look. "I'm a retired Auror. You know what this parchment is?" Seeing Orion's nod, he continued, "Interesting. I won't have to explain then that anything you say which is a lie will show up in red."

Orion shook his head, he knew what the parchment and quill did, had used it many times himself. The quill would transcribe the conversation and any lies would automatically be colored in red, allowing an interrogator to instantly see a lie. Not that he would be able to lie as he would be dosed with Veritaserum. He opened his mouth and stuck out his tongue. As the potion took effect he said, "I would prefer it if James didn't hear this story. He's a bit young yet to understand it."

Charles nodded and promptly shut and locked the doors and windows. "He knows not to come in here when the door's locked. He'll be OK on his own for a while."

Fixing Orion with a stern look, Charles then asked. "Is Orion Skywalker your real name?"

Orion sighed, the questioning had begun. Feeling the Veritaserum start to affect him he answered, "No."

"What is your real name?"

"Harry James Potter."

"Why are you here?"

"I'm a time-traveler from the future, I came back here because the future I come from isn't very nice and I want to change it."

"What relation are we to you?"

"You are my grandparents and James is my father."

The Veritaserum was abruptly cancelled thanks to a spell. Orion came back round to see Charles and Emma gaping at him. Finally Emma whispered, "It's almost unbelievable, yet both the Veritaserum and the parchment mean you weren't lying. What do you really look like?"

Orion sighed and cancelled the charms that he'd placed on himself before leaving the future. His hair went back to being messy and short and his eyes changed to the normal killing curse green. He stared at his grandparents who were looking from him to James outside in shock.

Rolling his eyes Orion said, "Uh, hi guys."

Emma fainted.

"It's amazing. Now that we've established your true identity we can have the rest of the story without the Veritaserum. I think we can safely say that you're not lying. You don't mind if we continue to

record it do you Harry?" Charles asked after waking his wife up.

Orion shook his head and replied, "No but could you please call me Orion. I can't be known as Harry Potter here, it would cause too much confusion later on." Charles looked at him and slowly nodded, understanding the reasons why his grandson would not want to be known by his true name.

"Let's hear it then, it should be a good tale," he said as he leant back in his seat. Emma was now hugging Orion tightly and Orion wrapped his arms round her, seeming happy at the contact.

"Well, it all begins when I was a baby," he started. Charles and Emma nodded attentively. "When I was born, Voldemort, that's a Dark wizard who will be causing trouble a few years from now, was on the rise. He had followers known as Death Eaters who were causing trouble, well, chaos and anarchy would be more like it. My parents, James, and a Muggleborn witch called Lily Evans, fought against him. They were members of an organization led by Dumbledore known as the Order of the Phoenix."

"What happened?" Charles asked.

Orion shook his head. "A prophecy was made about me that stated that a boy born to parents who defied Voldemort three times, born at the end of July, would be marked by Voldemort as his equal and would be able to kill him. My parents went into hiding under the Fidelius charm, choosing one of their three friends to be secret keeper."

"I know that charm. Voldemort wouldn't be able to find them as long as the secret keeper kept the secret," Emma commented. Orion nodded.

"They were going to choose my godfather to be their secret keeper but he persuaded them to choose another of their friends, believing

that he was too obvious. They didn't inform anyone of the switch so when their friend betrayed them, everyone thought it was my godfather who had done it and he was thrown in Azkaban, without a trial I might add."

"What happened to you?" Charles asked.

"I was sent to my mother's sister, a Muggle who loathed magic with every fiber of her being. I spent the next ten years being the Muggle version of a house-elf, being told lies about my parents and also being told that magic didn't exist. I slept in the cupboard under the stairs," Orion elaborated.

Charles and Emma were furious. "No child should be treated like that!" Emma fumed, with Charles adding, "Did no one do anything about it?"

Orion shook his head. "My uncle was sufficiently well connected to make any investigations disappear and I learnt early on not to tell anyone. Anyway, I went to Hogwarts and made friends. My years there were characterized by the Defence teachers trying to kill or harm me in one way or another, and going from being loved by the public, to being hated, and then back again."

"But what happened to Voldemort?" Emma asked.

Orion took a sip of water from the glass that Emma had handed him. "Right. Well, after my parents were betrayed, I was one year old at this stage, Voldemort came to find them. He killed my parents, and then tried to kill me. I survived the killing curse. It rebounded on Voldemort, due to the prophecy, and left me with nothing but this scar." Orion pushed up his fringe to show the familiar scar. "Anyway, back to Hogwarts. I was known to the general wizarding world as the Boy-Who-Lived, thanks to that killing curse rebounding off me. I grew up, making friends and enemies as one does through school, and then in my fourth year, I was illegally entered into the Tri-Wizard

Tournament, against three seventh years. There was a Death Eater at Hogwarts, who arranged for me to take part in Voldemort's rebirth ceremony, turning the Tri-Wizard cup into a portkey. He came back, but no one wanted to believe it."

Seeing that his grandparents were shocked Orion smiled. "I defeated him a year after I left Hogwarts. The reason the old snake survived the first time round was because he'd made Horcruxes to help him survive should he die. That is what I've come back to change mainly. I want to destroy all the Horcruxes so that when he dies the first time round, he truly dies."

Charles and Emma absorbed this and then Emma said, "So who did you marry?"

Orion smiled bitterly. "I had two good friends in school, Ronald Weasley and Hermione Granger. Ron was a bit jealous and hot-tempered, but a loyal friend nonetheless. He showed his jealous streak in fourth year during the Tri-Wizard fiasco, he thought I'd entered it myself you see, he couldn't see that I'd trade all the money I had just for the chance to spend even one day with my parents. Hermione was my conscience I suppose, and a good friend, sticking with me even when Ron didn't. Anyway, during our sixth year Ron and Hermione got together and I got together with Ron's little sister, Ginevra, known as Ginny. Neither relationship ended very well, me because I overheard Ginny planning to use me as her ticket to high society and generally having me as some sort of trophy, and Hermione because Ron's jealousy and insecurity regarding her spending time with any other guys, including me finally made him snap and in our seventh year he began to be very controlling and abusive towards her."

Charles narrowed his eyes at this. "I trust you put a stop to it," he asked.

Orion smirked coldly. "Yes. She was my friend and I'm fiercely

protective of my friends and those I consider family. No one hurt Hermione without me having a say in what happened in retaliation. In this case, it broke up my friendship with Ron, and once Hermione and I realized our feelings for each other, the friendship with Ginny died too."

"I take it that what happened to your family has something to do with those two then?" Emma inquired. Orion nodded briefly.

"What is it?" Emma asked. Orion shook his head.

"I'd prefer to use a pensieve for this" he whispered. He got his pensieve out of his trunk, placed the memories of the last few days in it and then sat back.

"Have a look," he said dully.

Charles and Emma entered the bowl and when they came out they had tears in their eyes. They proceeded to wrap Orion in a large hug, and Orion, to his embarrassment, found himself breaking down yet again.

"It's alright to cry," Charles whispered in his ear as Orion clung to both him and Emma. It wasn't the last time he would cry over the death of his family but he was now surrounded by a new one and he understood instinctively that he could let his guard down and heal here.

After the emotional storm had passed, Orion dried his eyes and sat back in his chair again. Charles and Emma looked at each other, and Orion raised his eyebrows, smiling slightly.

"What?" Charles asked, confused. Orion shook his head.

"Nothing. Just that now I understand what people meant when they said that Hermione and I could communicate by simply looking at

each other."

His grandparents rolled their eyes. "We've come up with a solution to the life debt issue Orion," Charles stated, using his grandson's new name.

Orion raised his eyebrows. "Yes?" he asked.

"We could adopt you into the family, it's not that unusual, and you'd keep the last name of Potter, therefore only having to remember your new name of Orion. That way, we could still get to know each other and no one would look too closely at how you came to be here."

"Is there precedent for this type of thing though?" Orion asked.

He was reassured as Emma hugged him. "Yes there is. The Unspeakables can whip you up a record of your life before coming here, and you can even go back to being an Unspeakable if you wish. It would certainly cement you as part of our society here."

Orion nodded cautiously. "Alright. What happens to my finding a house and things like that?"

"You can stay here until you find another place, or if you wish, Potter Manor is large enough that you could have your own wing," Charles replied.

Orion now smiled, a genuine, happy smile. "I'd like to go back to work as it was, although I don't want to be a team leader anytime soon. The memories are still too fresh. How are you going to explain this to James though?"

Charles shrugged. "We tell him that you're going to be one of the family now, he'll accept that, and then tomorrow we'll make you part of our society. Do you have any money?"

Orion now chuckled. "I brought my emergency cash with me; do you think several thousand galleons will be enough?"

An answering chuckle from Charles preceded the reply, "Oh I think that will do for a start. How much do you know of your family history?"

"Very little," Orion admitted.

Charles slung an arm round his shoulders. "Never mind that, plenty of time to learn. Dinner will be ready now, so why don't you call James in and we can tell him that you're now his uncle."

Orion choked at that pronouncement and almost fell over. "Uncle?" he queried. "Won't that be a tad awkward for him in a few years when I tell him my true relationship to him?"

"When were you planning on telling him?" Charles asked.

Orion looked bemused and replied, "When he's seventeen. Hopefully things will go as they did the first time round, just with a few minor changes, and I can tell James everything when he's of age."

Charles and Emma shrugged. "Go and get James inside now. He'll probably call you Uncle anyway, even if you don't like it. He'll adapt to the situation when he's older and will probably find it to be quite a good joke, knowing him," Emma laughed. Thinking of how his father had been described to him, Orion had to laugh too, feeling easier about the prospect of being his father's uncle. The idea did have a certain prank feel to it.

"James, time to come in," he called. James looked over at him and then swung his broom round and flew at him, jumping off in mid-air to land on the ground, just in front of him. Orion raised an eyebrow. "Neat trick, I tried that once and landed on my bum," he said. James grinned and raced inside, leaving Orion to hold the broom and wonder where it went.

"Just stick it in the hall closet," James said, popping his head back outside. Orion put the broom where he'd been directed and followed James into the dining room. Once there he looked for a spare seat, only for Charles to pull him into a seat next to his.

Looking round the table, Orion found himself opposite Emma and James was seated just beside her. He smiled at James, and was inwardly delighted to see a grin directed back. The meal passed quickly, all four of them being hungry. Once he'd finished eating James decided to get to know his rescuer.

"So, is your name really Orion?" he asked. Orion smiled and replied, "Yes it is. Do you play Quidditch – I noticed you were pretty good on that broom."

James shrugged. "Fairly good. I need more people to practice with though, Dad can only do so much and Mum doesn't like flying. Will you be staying with us?"

Charles intervened. "Yes he will James, as a matter of fact, we're adopting him into the family. His name will, as of tomorrow, be Orion Potter."

Orion chuckled when James protested, "But he needs a middle name too!"

Orion exchanged looks with Charles and Emma, silently saying that they could choose his middle name if they wanted to. Finally Charles said, "Alright. What name would you like him to have James?"

James thought for a second before grinning. "He could use my name. Orion James Potter, that sounds pretty good. What do you think Orion? That way, I could have been named after you, you see?"

Orion was now having some breathing difficulty. Orion James Potter.

The only thing that was different between his new name and his old one was the first name. He remembered that for all intents and purposes the future he knew might not exist anymore and James wasn't that uncommon a name. Finally he nodded.

"Orion James Potter it is then" he said, thinking that his father was going to have a heart attack when the truth was revealed in a few years. Charles and Emma grinned at him, both finding the situation that their grandson was in terribly amusing.

James wasn't finished though. "If you're being adopted into the family, does that mean I can call you Uncle Orion?" He gave a delighted whoop at Orion's faint nod, and jumped down from his chair, running round to Orion's chair and seizing the man in an exuberant hug. He was unprepared for the strong hug he got back but didn't mind. "This is so cool," he exclaimed before Orion gently but firmly pushed him back to his seat.

"So why is your wedding ring black, isn't it supposed to be gold?" he asked. His new uncle remained silent for a minute before replying, "You can charm wedding rings to turn black when your partner dies. My wife and three children were murdered a few days ago. I don't want to talk about it."

James winced. "Sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you," he muttered.

Orion reached across the table and gently gripped his hand. "I know. I will get over it, it's just going to take a while OK. Now, do you have any friends?"

James' eyes lit up as he described two friends he'd made at the park a few days earlier. Orion sat and listened, chuckling in amusement at James' hand gestures when he wanted to emphasize important points. Finally James ran out of steam and then asked, "So what do you do for work?"

"Well, I'm going to see if I can go back to my old line of work in the Ministry," Orion said cautiously.

James scowled. "You don't want to work there. Dad says that they're a bunch of ass kissers."

"James!" the three adults exclaimed as one before the unfortunate eight year old was hit with three Scourgify charms, Orion having cast his on instinct. When he noticed Charles and Emma staring at him he blushed slightly.

"Sorry. Force of habit. Had to use it with mine sometimes," he muttered. They nodded, not annoyed in the least. James, on the other hand was spluttering and glaring at all three of them. When the soap cleared he muttered an apology and raced off.

"He'll be alright," Charles said when Orion stood to follow him. "Didn't your kids react in the same way?"

Orion didn't reply for a second. "No. They glared at us yes but they stuck around afterwards, seeming to want to get back into our good books. Is he normally like that?"

Emma nodded. "Yes. He'll blow up at something, and go away to cool down, before coming back and everything will be fine again. Then again, if he really doesn't like something he can hold a grudge sometimes."

Orion nodded. "Now I know where I get it from," he commented with a small laugh. Charles and Emma chuckled as well. "So, if you don't mind, how old were they when they, well, you know" Emma asked.

"Daniel and Sirius were four, they were twins, and Lily was two," Orion said. His eyes had gone glassy and distant as he remembered. "They were so cute, all three. Dan was the loud one of them, always wanting to push the boundaries a bit. Sirius was quieter, more

manipulative. Lily seemed to want to read most of the time. We joked that with one parent being half Gryffindor-half Slytherin and the other being half Gryffindor-half Ravenclaw we got one Gryffindor, one Slytherin and one Ravenclaw."

A few minutes later Emma's prediction came true as James walked back in, looking apologetic. "Sorry about saying that," he mumbled, hugging both his parents and then looking uncertainly at Orion. Orion immediately held out his arms and James walked into them. Hugging the younger version of his father, Orion noticed the small flash of the camera that had appeared in his grandfather's hands and shook his head. The blackmail material was mounting up, as was the potential for embarrassment when the truth was revealed. At that point in time however, the newly re-named Orion James Potter didn't really care.

Author Note

Thank you for the response to my question at the end of the last chapter. I think I'll go with Harry's memories being the only remnant of the future he came from, as that will be the easiest to write and it makes sense given that some of the changes will be fairly major. Can anyone tell me the approximate term dates for primary schools in Britain? I need to know rough start and end of term dates plus when holidays are. I could be lazy and base the primary school dates on the Hogwarts school year but I don't want to take the lazy option unless it's the only one that fits my story.

Thank you for all the reviews so far, they're really helpful.

Padawan Lynne

Chapter Four: Starting A New Life

The next day, Orion and Charles walked into Gringotts to open a new vault for Orion. He ended up getting number 317 which made him smile as it was his birth date. After depositing his emergency money in there, the two wizards made their way to the Ministry.

Several hours later, Orion James Potter was registered with the Ministry of Magic as a time-traveler. Where he'd come from no one asked, and Orion didn't offer. The adoption into the Potter family caused a couple of eyebrows to rise until Charles explained about the life debt. This settled any further curiosity, and they were free to go to the Department of Mysteries.

"Ah Charles come in," said a familiar voice and Orion had to work hard to conceal his shock. Standing in front of him was none other than a younger looking Croaker. Orion's eyes automatically went to the badge on his shoulder, proclaiming him the Head of the Unspeakables, which Croaker noticed immediately.

"So you know what the badge means lad?" Croaker asked. Orion could only nod, and Charles quickly explained the situation. Once he'd finished, Croaker walked round Orion once and then smirked.

"You worked as an Unspeakable in the future, and I was probably your boss, given your reaction to me so far," he mused. "What was your name there?"

"Are you asking my real name or my Unspeakable one?" Orion responded coolly, all senses on alert. He was feeling comfortable here, he knew what to expect, but he still kept alert for anything unexpected. Croaker's eyes narrowed. "Both. I get the sense that Orion isn't your real name though the rest of it rings true. I also need a name to call you here. So, what were they?"

Orion looked his boss in the eye and said evenly, "My real name is

Harry James Potter, and my Unspeakable nickname was, and is, if you'll have me again, Hunter."

Croaker grinned. "Hunter you say. Animagus form?"

"Dual animagus, lion and wolf. Nicknames for those are Leo and Shadow respectively," Orion transformed into Leo and then Shadow, before transforming back. Croaker nodded again before turning to Charles.

"You can leave him here Charles, I'm not about to pass up an Unspeakable who's already trained. I'll have to see what rank you are though, so don't go anywhere Hunter," he added as Orion was thinking about looking around.

Orion stood still and waited until Croaker came and led him around, showing him the layout of the building, which hadn't changed too much. Most of what had changed was the people. Orion had to constantly remind himself that these Unspeakables were not his friends, not yet, but he hoped to make some over the coming weeks. He was given some curious glances as he followed Croaker to the main office but no one came up to enquire. Orion smirked inwardly; they probably thought he was a new recruit.

"What do we tell them regarding my time-traveler status and my previous occupation?" Orion asked as he read over the standard Unspeakable contract, making sure to read the fine print. Croaker smirked. "Tell them the truth but use only your nickname, no need to reveal everything. May I ask what rank you were in the future?"

Orion shrugged. "I can't remember everything but I do know that I was a seven black" he offered. He then had the satisfaction of seeing his boss blink in shock. Seven black meant that he could cast all three Unforgivables pretty easily, although Orion only used them as a last resort.

"You must be fairly experienced then, what about the other colors?" Croaker enquired. Orion shrugged. "I've got my robes with me at home, I can wear them tomorrow and you can adjust my ranking as you see fit sir."

"We need a new team leader for the team known as the Wolves. You interested?"

Orion shook his head. "Not yet sir. Before I came here, I was involved in a fight against dark wizards, led by one of my former friends. I lost my entire team due to the enemy using some innovative magical products that we didn't manage to dispel in time. I don't feel comfortable with leading a team at the moment."

Croaker looked at his newest Unspeakable. "Hunter, I know the pain you must be feeling, and the sense of guilt that you couldn't do more to help them. But, if you don't take the position again, you may very well forever feel unworthy to hold it. You know that we don't let new teams out into the field without training them to work together first so take the position and get comfortable with leading again."

"Won't the others resent it?" Orion queried.

Croaker shook his head. "This is where your time-traveler status and previous occupation comes in handy. They won't think of you as a new recruit, not when they see what your black ranking is in particular. Which reminds me, once you've signed that contract I'll take you to the training room to give the announcement, and you can give a demonstration of your skills."

"Why is my new team called the Wolves?" Orion asked as he signed the contract with a blood quill, not even wincing at the slight sting on the back of his hand. Croaker smiled. "Because they're all wolf animagi. Rather intriguing actually, that we have five Unspeakables all with the same form. That includes you by the way. We've never had a dual animagus either."

"Wonderful," Orion muttered as he stepped into the familiar, yet different, training room. His eyes swept over the assembled wizards and witches, noting the cloaks that hid their badges, and therefore their rankings from him, although they all had the hoods down, thereby revealing their faces. He smirked when he noticed some of the older ones obviously dismiss him as an unskilled newbie.

"Everyone, I have an announcement. This here is Hunter. He will be joining us as of today. He is a time-traveler from the future and worked as an Unspeakable there. I'm going to test him to see what his ranking is, but as he was a level three operative in the future, I don't see the point in lowering it. Any objections?"

There was some muttering but no serious objections until one younger Unspeakable spoke up. Glaring at Orion, the wizard snapped, "He might have been a team leader in the future but how can we be certain his skills are up to it here? What is his ranking?"

Orion sighed. "If I might make a suggestion? I could apparate home, get my Unspeakable robes and come back. Alternatively, I could let you all watch as Croaker here assesses me. After that, if you're not satisfied that I'm up to it then you can duel me if you wish."

The Unspeakable shifted slightly and then growled, "I think all of us would like to see your assessment Hunter."

Orion shrugged. "Very well." He turned to Croaker. "Want to do it now sir?" he asked. Croaker nodded and the rest of the Unspeakables retired to the room just outside the training room where they could watch the assessment.

Croaker and Orion faced off at opposite ends of the room. With a small smirk Croaker changed the room to look like an old manor house. Grinning, Orion ducked behind a chair as the first spell came flying towards him.

"Crucio!" he growled, deciding to start with a strong offensive straight off. Croaker ducked and fired a bone shattering curse back. Orion rolled out of the way and then cast a handful of spells on himself, silencing his footsteps, and disillusioning himself as well. Then he moved stealthily towards his boss' position. He didn't underestimate Croaker; the man wouldn't be head of the Unspeakables without knowing how to fight well. He ducked a hair growth charm, and then dodged a sticking charm.

Outside the room the other Unspeakables were watching and were slowly becoming impressed. "He knows a variety of spells, and he's inventive," an Unspeakable who went by the nickname of Reaper commented, as they watched Orion fire the Alopecia charm at Croaker.

"Holy hell it hit him!" one of the others gasped as Croaker suddenly found himself bald and in pain. He collapsed to the ground as Orion cast a strong Cruciatus curse on him and then followed it up with an equally strong Imperius curse. Croaker wasn't finished though. He threw off the Imperius and staggered to his feet, throwing flame spells in a wide arc in front of him. Orion ducked and rolled forward, casting two spells in rapid succession, a bone shattering curse which shattered Croaker's left leg and a decapitation spell which missed Croaker by a hair.

Orion followed this up with a rapid fire series of spells, keeping Croaker on the defensive, all his spells delivered at speed and with stunning accuracy. Croaker was forced to dodge and shield more than attack and the few times he did attack Orion was able to shield against it. Finally Orion hit Croaker with another strong Cruciatus and the head Unspeakable collapsed.

"Enough!" Croaker called. The manor house faded away, and Orion hurried over to his boss. They had moved throughout the house during the battle, into several rooms and out of them again.

Crouching beside Croaker, Orion hurriedly cast several healing spells, staunching the blood loss from several cutting curses that he'd hit Croaker with, and repairing the broken bones. When the healers entered the room they found themselves with very little to do with regards to Croaker but they insisted on patching up Orion, who hadn't come out of the duel unscathed. He had several wounds from various curses, as well as a broken rib and a concussion. Once they'd healed him Orion collapsed beside Croaker, regaining his breath.

"Thank you Hunter," Croaker said tiredly. "I won't be dueling against you for a while; you're bloody vicious in battle."

Orion smiled tiredly and replied, "I fully agree with you sir. I hadn't actually dueled you properly in the future; I was too busy fighting other wizards. Do you think I proved myself to any doubters out there?"

"Yes you have," Reaper said from behind him. Orion turned to see the rest of the Unspeakables standing behind him, all wearing looks that ranged from awe to respect. "We're not about to challenge someone who can beat the boss. But, what the hell was that shaving charm for?"

Orion laughed. "I used it when I was training an arrogant upstart in the future. The idiot thought he'd try to Avada Kedavra me, so I humiliated him. The scream he let out when all his hair disappeared..."

The others laughed and Orion found his hand being shaken by his new workmates. "Just call me Hunter," he said upon being asked for his name. When the crowd dispersed, Orion found himself left with four Unspeakables who were looking at him with uncertainty and Croaker who had now recovered.

"Here are your new robes Hunter," Croaker growled, handing Orion a

set of robes and a cloak. Orion promptly put them on. "Your ranking too" Croaker added, tapping the badge on the left side of Orion's robes. "Oh and these are your new team members, the Wolves," he said just as he left.

Orion looked down and was pleased to see the familiar bars of color on the robes. The Unspeakable ranking system was based around a badge which could be hidden from view. Across the top of the badge was a number which indicated which team he belonged to, and a number of gold pips. The number of pips indicated what level an Unspeakable was at. One pip indicated a trainee, or someone that was still learning the ropes. Two indicated an ordinary team member who had enough training to go out on missions. Three pips was a team leader, and four indicated that the person was able to command several teams at once on a mission. Level five was Croaker and his second in command. Orion was very pleased, and somewhat apprehensive, to see the three pips next to the number four on the top of his badge.

Next were the categories of spells that Unspeakables were expected to know. Offensive spells were indicated by a red bar and defensive spells were green. Healing spells were yellow, covert and stealth spells were blue. Ability to use the Unforgivables was indicated by black. Each color bar had seven sections to it, the higher the number of colored in sections; the better you were in that area.

"So what sort of ranking do you have Hunter?" one of the Unspeakables who were left asked. Orion looked at him and then tapped his badge, revealing it. The Wolves looked at it and then him in shock. "Bloody hell Hunter, did you fight in a war or something, to get this kind of ranking!" the first Unspeakable, whose nickname was Diamond, whispered.

Orion's badge was fairly impressive. He had a solid bar of red, meaning that all seven sections were filled, six green, five yellow, and seven blue. He also had a solid bar of black.

"A seven black, no one's going to mess with you once they see that," Shade whistled. Orion looked at her and smirked. "That'll be useful then. Am I allowed to see your rankings or not?"

Diamond, Shade, Reaper and Kestrel all revealed their badges for their new leader. Orion looked at them, noting that they were all level twos, and the difference in ranking between them. Diamond had five reds, three greens, seven blues, four yellow and three blacks. Shade had six reds, four greens, four blues, three yellows and no blacks. Reaper had four reds, seven greens, three blues, two yellows and four blacks. Kestrel had five reds, six greens, five blues, one yellow and one black.

"Well, aren't we a colorful group," Orion remarked, earning a grin from his new teammates. "Can you all transform into your animagus forms for me? I'm a dual animagus but for work I'll use my wolf form."

The Unspeakables looked at each other and then changed smoothly into their wolf forms. They looked expectantly at Orion who changed into Shadow and stood there with ears pricked and tail up. The five wolves then howled at the ceiling, before changing back.

"Right then, I'm feeling a bit hungry. Shall we retire to the cafeteria and get to know each other before we begin training together?" Orion smiled, leading the way to the Ministry cafeteria. The rest of the Ministry workers noticed their robes and steered clear of them. No one wanted to mess with an Unspeakable as no one really knew what they did.

"So are the same rules in effect here for what level you have to be at regarding defensive and offensive spells in order for trainees to go on missions?" Orion asked as they sat down with their food.

Diamond nodded. "Yes. You have to have a minimum of two reds and greens to go on missions. It's best if you have some blues as well.

Yellows and blacks aren't truly needed for first missions; you get those as you learn more. So, Hunter, why did you come here or do you not want us to know?"

Orion looked at his new team. "I don't want to tell you here, too many prying eyes and ears. Also, the future that I come from is one I intend to change anyway. Plus, well, we might be team mates but we don't really know each other. Wait a few weeks, give me time to get to know you and for you to get to know me, and for us to develop into a proper team. I will tell you that just before I came here I lost my entire team due to our enemy turning the tables on us and killing them all, plus a group of Aurors that were working with us. I was left alive because their leader needed me alive. Make of that what you will."

The Wolves looked at each other. "Shit happens Hunter. We don't know the situation but the very fact that you're obviously hurting over it means that you cared about your team mates. We'll all learn to work together and hopefully what happens before won't happen again," Reaper commented after a brief silence.

Orion nodded grimly. "Particularly as the products they used against us won't be developed for a good few years yet. Plus I have no intention of being suckered into that sort of trap again."

"You'll get over it Hunter. We've all lost team members before, it sucks but you have to get over it and go on. Come on. We've got our first training mission in an hour or so," Kestrel said quietly.

Orion looked at the young Unspeakable and smirked. "Right. Let's get to it then. I wonder what the Toad will throw at us."

Hearing choked noises from his team he turned and smirked. "What. Don't tell me you don't call him that. We did all the time."

"Behind his back no doubt," Shade grinned. Orion merely chuckled and led the way to the training room for his first training mission with

his new team.

After an exhausting day, Orion stumbled out of the fireplace at Potter Manor and crashed right into James. "Sorry, I don't handle the Floo very well," he mumbled and then dropped to one knee as he lost his balance completely.

"Ouch," he growled, looking up as he heard a smothered chuckle from James. "Yes it's very funny I'm sure, now could you help me up, I'd like to make it to the dining room for dinner sometime in the next year."

James looked a bit hurt. "I didn't mean to upset you Uncle Orion," he said, his tone informing Orion that he was upset.

Grimacing, Orion ruffled his hair. "I know kiddo, I'm just tired from today's training session and I need to recover some energy. Just let me eat and then you can tell me everything you did today, alright."

James nodded, mollified. He walked silently beside Orion, and sat next to him at the table. Charles and Emma were already there. "Sorry if I kept you waiting," Orion apologized as he reached for the roast chicken.

"Don't worry Orion, you didn't. We were just about to start when we heard you come through the Floo," Emma replied. "Busy day?" she asked.

Orion nodded tiredly. "Yes. I met my new team mates today, and we were put through a tough training mission. I'll be fine. I just wasn't expecting the intensity level to be so high on the first day."

After dinner, Orion sat on the couch in the sitting room with Charles and Emma and listened to James describing his day. "I met two people at the park; their names were Sirius Black and Remus Lupin. They were fun. Mr Black was alright but sort of cold. Sirius has a

younger brother too, called Regulus but he wasn't there today. Remus was fun too, a bit quieter than Sirius but still fun. He seemed tired. His aunt didn't like him very much either. Kept referring to him as a freak. She wasn't a muggle though; at least I don't think so. Why would she call him that?"

Orion sat deep in thought. So Sirius and Remus had come into the picture earlier than predicted. Hmm. Maybe he could also help Remus. He didn't know what he could do for Sirius but if events played out as before then his future godfather would be coming to live with them in seven years anyway. He was pulled out of his thoughts by James shaking him.

"Uncle Orion! Where were you? You went quiet."

Orion shook himself. "It's OK James, I was just thinking. Could I meet your friends tomorrow?"

"What about work?"

"I don't have work tomorrow; my boss gave me and my team the weekend off. Plus I need to start meeting people anyway."

James shrugged. "It's OK with me. Mum, Dad, what do you think?"

Charles and Emma shrugged. "I think your uncle is right, he needs to get out and meet people, and this is a good way to do it. You'd better go to bed soon though, if you want to be up early in the morning," Charles replied after a moment.

James scowled and Charles pinched the bridge of his nose. "James, do not start that battle please. I said you could stay up till half past eight, it's almost that now. You will have your bedtime extended next year; do not argue the point."

James was still scowling and Orion glanced at his grandparents

before deciding that what worked with his kids might very well work with his father too. "James, if you go to bed now, I'll introduce you to a game that my children used to love tomorrow, after we've met your friends."

James was still scowling and he then said quite clearly, "No. Sorry Uncle Orion but that won't work. I want to stay up!"

Holding out a hand to stop Charles from interfering, Orion simply said, "Fine. Then you've opted for the hard way." Before James could move, Orion had him in a body bind and was floating him up the stairs to bed. James could still talk though and soon his parents heard him begin cursing Orion. The cursing ended abruptly, to be replaced with spluttering sounds and then finally silence. Ten minutes later Orion came back downstairs looking distinctly ruffled.

"Merlin! I wonder if I'd have been that stubborn with Dad had I grown up with him" he muttered.

Charles laughed. "Probably. It's a Potter trait I'm afraid, extreme stubbornness. That and a talent for mischief. Did you have to body bind him though?"

Orion shrugged. "I didn't want to have to deal with the possibility of dropping him if he managed to squirm out of my hold on the way up. It didn't hurt him. What would you have done?"

Charles rolled his eyes. "The same thing, only without the body bind."

"Yeah well, I tried it once without the body bind and Dan kicked me in a sensitive area. I have no desire to experience it again thank you very much."

Charles smirked. "How did you manage to keep them from bouncing out of bed? James will probably be down here in about five minutes."

Orion just smirked. "No he won't. I stuck him in bed with Sticking Charms; they will wear off when he's truly asleep."

Emma stared at him and then turned to her husband. "Why didn't we think of that?" she demanded, before both she and Charles started laughing.

"We definitely have to remember that one" Charles remarked once he'd stopped laughing. Orion grinned.

"Yeah, it is useful. Now, if you don't mind, I'm headed for bed, I've got some new people to meet tomorrow and I'd prefer to be awake for it" he remarked, kissing Emma on the cheek before heading up to bed.

'I do need to find my own place soon though' he thought as he closed his eyes. Living with his family was wonderful but he wanted to be independent. He would see what sort of person Remus' aunt was tomorrow, but if she was as bad as James described, he would see what he could do to help the younger version of his former professor.

'There goes my saving people thing again' was the last thing that floated through his mind as sleep claimed him.

Chapter Five: New Friends and Enemies

Orion and James headed off to the park near the house soon after breakfast the next morning. It was fine and warm, with hardly any clouds in the sky. James was almost bouncing with eagerness but didn't want to race off without his uncle's permission. Orion had asked him to stay with him until they reached the park and then he'd be allowed to go and play.

When they reached the park, Orion's keen eyes spotted two boys that he knew instantly must be the young Sirius and Remus. This was confirmed when James yelled, "OI SIRIUS, REMUS. OVER HERE!" The two boys raced over and stopped when they saw Orion.

"Hello sir," they said, holding out their hands. Orion shook each one, smiling warmly. "Hello boys. You must be Sirius Black and Remus Lupin. James has told me about you. I'm his uncle, Orion."

"Pleased to meet you," Sirius murmured, seeming slightly intimidated. This was broken a few seconds later when James pulled them away. "You'll get used to him. He's really nice, works at the Ministry...." His comments faded into the distance as Orion made his way over to a man and a woman.

"Hello. I'm Orion Potter, James' uncle. I don't believe we've met," he said politely, holding his hand out. The man, who looked a lot like Sirius, shook it. "Orion Black, I'm Sirius' father. I gather your nephew and my son are friends?"

Orion shrugged. "If they're not at the moment then they're fast becoming friends. And, I'm sorry ma'am; I don't believe we were introduced."

The woman shook his hand as well. "Yvonne. I'm Remus' aunt, although I wish I weren't."

Orion raised an eyebrow. "He seems like a nice boy to me. Is there anything wrong?" Orion Black snorted. "The boy is apparently a werewolf. She's prejudiced against them."

Orion looked at Yvonne and what he saw almost made him sick. "If he is a werewolf then it's not his fault that he was bitten," he said. "He's only dangerous one night a month."

Yvonne sneered at him. "His parents couldn't cope with his disease and left him to me. I don't want a filthy creature like that associated with me. If it weren't entirely unbecoming, I'd dump him. I'm sure a wolf pack somewhere would adopt him!"

Now Orion was getting annoyed. "Yvonne, if you wish, I can come round on the full moon and help control his wolf side. I can keep him away from you and under control for the night, and on every full moon if that would make you feel better."

Yvonne sniffed disdainfully. "If you want to waste your time like that then I don't mind. I'll give you our address. I don't want to deal with him."

Orion turned to watch the three boys in the distance, quietly fuming as Yvonne moved away after shoving a scrap of parchment at him. He sensed Sirius' father move up beside him. "You don't have any prejudice against werewolves?" he asked.

The Black patriarch snorted. "No. My wife is the one that hates anything to do with creatures. I agree with you, it's not Remus' fault. Also, as we both have the same name, is there a nickname or something I can use for you so we don't get confused?"

Now Orion looked at Sirius' father in surprise. "You can call me Leo if you wish. Forgive me but I was told that the Blacks were a pro-Dark family, as well as pureblood fanatics."

The older wizard smirked at him. "Yes well, my wife is the one that reinforces that image. I just stay in the background and manage our finances and keep the family under control. I'm actually pleased that Sirius is making friends with your nephew, although I'm told that you were adopted into the Potter family."

Orion shrugged. "Yes but if James wants to call me Uncle Orion I'm not about to put a stop to it. I'm pleased at the friendship too, although I believe that those three might give Hogwarts a bit of trouble with pranks when they get old enough."

This drew a chuckle from his companion. "Yes. Regulus, my younger son, is definitely headed for Slytherin, but Sirius, well; I think he might be a Gryffindor. What house were you in?"

Orion looked sideways at him. "If you know that I was adopted into the Potter family then you also know about my other circumstances?"

"You mean your time-traveler status? Yes I know, but it's common knowledge. Nothing to be concerned about. So, what house were you in at Hogwarts?"

"Gryffindor but the Hat did want me in Slytherin," Orion admitted.

"I think that Sirius might be in the same boat. His mother is determined that he end up in Slytherin like the rest of the family but I won't be too upset if he ends up in Gryffindor. He does have that foolishly courageous streak in him, rather than a manipulative, cunning streak."

Orion glanced briefly at the older wizard before saying "Not every family member ends up in the same house." This was answered with a chuckle as the two wizards stood watching their sons playing a game of Aurors vs Dark wizards.

"Rather an amusing rendition of what happens when real Aurors go

up against Dark wizards," Orion smirked as they watched James who was the "Auror" fall backwards in surprise as Sirius and Remus who were the "Dark wizards" jumped on him.

"What do you intend to do about Remus?"

Orion considered the question for a moment. "I don't know yet. One of my father's best friends was a werewolf so I have no prejudice against them. The only issue I have is when one or two go around deliberately infecting people."

Orion Black nodded in agreement, before calling Sirius over to him. "I'll see you again soon Leo, have you received an invitation to the party we're hosting?" Seeing the younger wizard shake his head, he dug around in his pocket. "Here. Walburga, my wife, insists that I carry them around with me, and that I give them to "suitable" people. The Snapes and Malfoys are coming too; you ought to meet them as well. The invitation is for your entire family by the way, so James is most definitely welcome." He and Sirius then walked away as Orion stared after them, deep in thought.

He looked down at the invitation and shook his head again, sticking it in his pocket. "Come on James, we'd best be getting home. I need to talk to Remus for a second, start off home and I'll catch up."

James waited by the park bench while Orion spoke to Remus. "Your aunt told me what you are Remus. Don't worry," he said as Remus looked panicked, "I figured it out and she confirmed it. I have arranged with your aunt to come over in five days when the full moon is up. I can't stop the transformation but I can help you by staying with you."

Remus looked unconvinced. "But won't you be in danger?"

Orion shook his head. "A werewolf is only a danger to people and only on the actual full moon. My animagus form, a wolf, should be

large enough to control your wolf form, as it's only a pup am I right?" Remus nodded and then surprised both himself and Orion by hugging him.

"Thank you," he whispered before running off after his aunt. Orion watched in hidden sadness and sympathy as Remus was yanked along by the arm. 'I will find a way to help you Remus' he thought as he walked back to Potter Manor with James in tow.

When they got back to Potter Manor, James retreated to his room to do his homework while Orion talked to Charles about the invitation. He'd never attended a formal wizard party before, having dodged all the ones in the future so he was a little concerned about what to expect.

"Don't worry about it Orion, just wear formal robes, and converse politely. It's basically a meet and greet type of affair, nothing too serious. Just be yourself," Charles advised.

"Thanks Charles. At least James will have someone to talk to with Sirius being there. It appears that I have inadvertently chosen the same name as his father. That ought to be amusing."

Charles chuckled. "Yes. Did you give him another name to call you by while you're with him?"

Orion snorted. "I gave him my lion animagus nickname, Leo. Is it true that my status as a time-traveler is available for the entire Ministry to know?"

"Did he say something about it?" Charles asked sharply.

Orion shrugged. "He mentioned it was common knowledge, and then said it was nothing to worry about. Was he misleading me?"

"No. He's a good man, a bit set in his views on muggleborns and the

possible threat they pose to our world but if you're worried about him joining Voldemort in a few years then don't be. He's a powerful wizard but no matter his political views, he doesn't go in for wholesale murder and mayhem. Walburga is the one you want to be careful around with regards to that."

Orion nodded thoughtfully. "The party is three days from now. The Snapes and Malfoys are apparently coming as well; do you know anything about them?"

Emma cut into the conversation. "The Malfoys are part of the pro-Dark faction; they support the view that Muggleborns aren't worthy to be part of society. The Snapes mostly keep to themselves but apparently Tobias Snape is friends with them."

Orion shrugged. "OK. I can handle that. I have several sets of formal robes, any suggestions on which set I should wear?"

Emma smirked. "Oh this is going to be fun. Go and get them all down Orion, we'll see which set would work. You want to portray the image of a powerful, but not arrogant, young wizard. The fact that you're an Unspeakable will help; you can do that sort of image in your sleep I bet."

Orion nodded. "Yes I can. It's very useful in some situations. Let's get the dress up part over with so I can relax."

A couple of hours later, Emma and Orion had decided together on the robes that Orion would wear to the party. They were a deep green with gold trim round the edge, and when combined with Orion's natural confidence, helped sell the image they wanted. When James came running down the stairs to see Orion standing there dressed up he stood and stared.

"Wow Uncle Orion, that looks cool," he breathed.

Orion smirked. "Glad you like it. We're going to a party at the Black's house in three days, you're invited too."

James whooped in delight before running back upstairs to check which of his sets of formal robes were clean. This was going to be fun.

Three days later the Potters showed up at Number Twelve Grimmauld Place. Orion and Walburga Black were present to greet them, with Sirius and Regulus standing just behind them. They were the last to arrive.

"Ah Charles, Emma, nice to meet you. Orion, it's a pleasure to see you again too and this must be James," Orion Black said with a smile. Charles, Emma and Orion shook his hand and then Walburga's. "These are our sons, Sirius and Regulus. Why don't we let them go off and get acquainted while we talk?"

Charles, Emma and Orion acquiesced and James, Sirius and Regulus raced off to who knew where. The three elder Potters moved further into the living room of the Black house. Charles was drawn into conversation with Orion Black while Walburga cornered Emma. This left Orion free to wander round and get acquainted with several other families that he hadn't met before.

"Orion Potter am I right?" a voice drawled from his left. Turning to face the speaker, Orion saw a man that had to be a Malfoy. His suspicion was confirmed when the wizard held out a hand. "Abraxas Malfoy. This is my son, Lucius."

Orion shook both Abraxas and Lucius' hands firmly. "Orion Potter. It's a pleasure to meet you. Do you work at the Ministry?"

Abraxas smirked. "I...make a few donations here and there. I'm more into politics. What about you Orion, may I call you Orion?"

Orion nodded wordlessly. "Yes, I work at the Ministry. I'm involved in researching ancient artifacts." Abraxas nodded coolly.

"Lucius, why don't you go and get acquainted with James, Sirius, and Regulus. Also, remember to make a good impression. We don't want to make enemies."

Lucius nodded. "Yes father." He wandered off to speak with Sirius and James. Orion, watching his progress, snorted inwardly when Lucius' idea of "make a good impression" involved acting superior to the other boys. This predictably did not end well and Abraxas, who had also been watching, growled.

"Honestly, does he never learn," he hissed and stalked over to grab Lucius and pull him away before James or Sirius punched him. Orion smirked and moved further round the room, socializing with various witches and wizards who wanted to talk with him.

During one of the breaks in conversation, he spotted James talking animatedly with a young boy who looked oddly familiar to Orion. When the unknown boy scowled at a comment that James made, Orion had to smother a chuckle. He knew who James' companion was – he'd just seen the young version of Severus Snape if he remembered that scowl correctly.

James and Severus talked a bit more and then James grabbed hold of Severus' arm and pulled him over to Orion.

"Hi Uncle Orion. This is my new friend Severus Snape. Sev, this is my uncle, Orion," James said happily. Severus looked up at Orion, who smiled at him and then held out his hand. After a brief hesitation, Severus shook it.

"Pleased to meet you sir," Severus said, looking curiously at Orion. "James said you know a lot about curses, and also potions."

Orion smiled at his future potions professor. "I do know a lot about curses but I only know the basics of potions. The only potions I know in depth are those I need for work, I'm afraid."

Severus shrugged. "Not everyone likes potions. I do, I like reading about them, making them, being around them. It's relaxing."

Orion nodded. "That's how I feel about flying. Does your father like potions too?"

Severus glared fiercely at the floor, and Orion had to bite back a chuckle, wondering what on earth the floor had done to deserve that death glare. "No. He thinks I'm no good as a wizard simply because I prefer making potions to learning spells. That's why I was over there," he waved vaguely at the corner, "because he didn't want me talking to people and embarrassing him by displaying the fact that I'm not a true wizard. He calls potions an option for weak wizards with no more magic than a squib."

Now it was Orion's turn to scowl and Severus asked, "What's wrong?"

Orion shook his head. "Your father reminds me of my uncle that's all," he commented.

Severus shrugged again and then asked, "What do you think of potions. Did you like it when you went to school?"

Orion smirked. "I thought I was going to but my potions teacher started humiliating me in the very first class, just because he didn't like my father. I wasn't bad at the subject, but he constantly marked me down."

"He sounds like a jerk," Severus said, and Orion had to bite back laughter at hearing Severus describe his future self like that. James tugged at Severus' arm impatiently, wanting his new friend to pay

attention to him again.

"Let's go play Exploding Snap, I'll introduce you to Sirius too," he said. Severus looked back at Orion as James dragged him off towards where Sirius and Regulus were waiting. Orion shrugged, and Severus gave him a small smile before sitting down with the other boys.

Several minutes later the party was interrupted by the sound of an argument.

"Severus!" Tobias Snape yelled. "What are you doing over here? I told you that you're not to talk to anyone, or have those potions finally addled your brain enough that you can't follow simple instructions?"

"He's only playing a game with us Mr Snape," James said indignantly, standing up to protect his friend. Severus stood up too, not wanting James to be hurt on his account.

"Father, what's wrong with playing a game? James and Sirius are my new friends," he said quietly. This was the wrong thing to say. The next instant there was the sound of a slap and Severus was on the floor, while James and Sirius watched in shock. Tobias moved towards Severus with every intention of hitting him again only to find something considerably larger than his son standing in front of him.

"You will leave Severus alone," Orion hissed, enraged. He couldn't stand child abusers, and he wasn't going to stand by and watch Severus be hurt.

Tobias scowled at Orion, magic radiating off him. Orion met his angry stare with ice-cold fury in his eyes and let a bit of his own magic out. Faced with a wizard that was obviously more powerful than him, Tobias backed down and stalked off, growling.

Orion scowled as Tobias retreated and then looked down when he

felt a tug on his sleeve.

"Thank you," Severus whispered, "but he'll only take it out on me or Mum when we get home. He's like that you see. I can't do anything to stop him. Mum tries to protect me but..."

He turned to look at James and Sirius who were still in shock. "You guys are lucky; you don't know what it's like to live in fear of someone you should be able to trust."

James and Sirius each hesitantly put a hand on one of his shoulders. "You're still our friend, mate," Sirius said, with none of his usual boisterousness. James nodded, equally serious. "Are you OK Severus?" James asked.

Severus reached up to touch his cheek where his father had hit him. He winced, feeling the painful area. It would start to bruise soon. Orion knelt down so he was at eye level with the eight year old.

"Do you want me to heal that?" Orion asked, keeping his voice soft and his body language as non-threatening as possible. Severus hesitated for a moment and then nodded.

Orion drew his wand slowly; making sure that Severus could see what he was doing and then put the tip on the injured area. One healing spell later and Orion found Severus attached to his chest, hugging him in gratitude. Gently, he hugged him back, before releasing him.

"Why don't you get back to your game, I'll come back in a little while, see how singed you all are and heal any burns." He smirked at the groans this produced and walked over to grab another drink, keeping an eye on Tobias, ready to move back should the other wizard approach the four boys again. He also noticed that Abraxas was looking calculatingly at him, and smirked when their eyes met. The Malfoy patriarch smirked back and raised his glass slightly, a move

which Orion mirrored.

He found himself cornered by Eileen Snape and Walburga Black at the drinks table. Eileen smiled nervously at him and said, "I saw what you did for Severus just now. Thank you. My husband can be a bit unreasonable; it was good that you stepped in. I don't know what's going to happen when we get home though."

Orion now frowned. "It was nothing Mrs Snape. My uncle was much like your husband, only I took the full brunt of his anger, he never hit my aunt. I couldn't stand by and let another child be hurt like that." He took a drink and continued, "I can't do anything legally, at least I don't think so, but if you or Severus ever need a break from your husband, you are more than welcome at my house."

"Do you have one? I was under the impression that you lived at Potter Manor at the moment?" Eileen said, before adding, "And please, call me Eileen."

Orion smiled. "That's true but I was thinking of buying one tomorrow. Move in, get the Floo hooked up, things like that."

Eileen now looked thoughtful. "Do you have children Mr Potter?" she asked. Orion looked at her briefly. "I did Eileen. Please call me Orion. They, along with my wife, were murdered. I miss them."

Eileen shook her head. "I'm sorry for bringing up bad memories. My reason for asking was this, if there was a legal way for you to help, would you?"

Orion looked at her guardedly. "Yes, but what are you thinking of doing exactly?"

Eileen smiled. "I don't know if it will work, but if it does, would you agree to become Severus' guardian in the event that something happens to me or my husband?"

Now Orion was shocked. "You barely know me Eileen, and you're asking me to be your son's guardian?"

Eileen smiled at him. "I saw you step in to help my son, most of the wizards here wouldn't have done so. You've been a parent, and what you've told me regarding your childhood tells me that you won't abuse him the way Tobias does. Plus, as long as you're financially stable he'll be fine."

Orion was shaking his head. "This is not what I expected Eileen. I have no objections to the idea but have you discussed this with Severus? I didn't like it when people arranged my life for me and I doubt that he will either. We only just met tonight and we don't know each other. You can't just casually suggest that I become his guardian based on one meeting. Also, I can't step into that role as long as you and your husband are alive."

"Yes you can. I know I've dropped a bombshell on you Orion and I'm sorry for that. When you get yourself set up, Floo me at Snape Manor, and we can discuss this further. I'm not trying to pressure you into doing this and you are under no obligation to agree if you decide you don't want to. I just want my son to be safe and Tobias is not safe. I'm sorry."

Eileen headed off to talk to Emma and Charles leaving Orion staring after her in total shock. He sensed he was being watched and turned to see Walburga Black looking at him.

"I'm sorry Mrs Black, I wasn't deliberately ignoring you," he said, smiling at her. Walburga frowned briefly before shaking his hand. "It's alright. Do you like the house?"

Orion looked round. "It's very nice. What's with the house elf heads?" he asked.

Walburga smirked. "They get beheaded when they get too old to carry tea trays. I understand you've met my son Sirius?"

Orion nodded. "Yes. He's a nice boy."

Walburga snorted. "He's far too nice to Muggles and blood traitors," she snapped. "Which brings me to my next question, where do you stand on the blood issue and the threat that Mudbloods pose to our world?"

Orion kept his expression neutral and reminded himself that this woman was his hostess and he couldn't insult her. "I think that the secrecy of our world should be protected, but I don't believe that killing Muggleborns or otherwise discriminating against them will help. If we used some sort of spell to keep them from telling anyone but their immediate family about our world, secrecy would be protected and magic would survive."

"What do you mean?" Walburga asked.

Orion shrugged. "I mean that in a few years, the purebloods will breed themselves out of existence. New blood, in the form of Muggleborn witches and wizards refresh a bloodline and strengthen the magic."

"As well as weaken it!" the witch snapped.

"Magical strength isn't necessarily tied to blood status Mrs Black," Orion stated evenly. "I knew a very powerful Muggleborn witch, and two very weak purebloods. Yes, overall, Muggleborns are less powerful, but, there are quite a few that are above average or even very strong when it comes to power. I myself am a half-blood by your standards, and yet I have quite a lot of magical power."

"Which of your parents was the Muggle?" Walburga said after a few minutes of silence. Orion smirked. "Neither. My father was a

pureblood wizard and my mother a Muggleborn witch."

Walburga snorted. "You do have a point Mr Potter; however it's not one that will find much favor with others, especially among the old pureblood families. You'd do well to keep your blood status to yourself if you want to make friends in the sort of circles that we move in."

Orion bowed slightly to her. "I shall keep that in mind," he said and walked off, glad to be free of her. 'And I thought she was bad as a painting' he thought, seeking out Charles. He needed to talk to his grandfather about the shocking bombshell that Eileen Snape had dropped on him, and also about buying a house.

He didn't get a chance to talk to Charles until after the party was over and they were back at Potter Manor. James had gone straight to bed with no protests as he was very tired. The last thing he said as he dropped off to sleep was, "Can I have a sleepover and invite Remus, Sirius and Severus?" Charles had agreed and James fell asleep with a smile on his face.

"What is it Orion?" Charles asked as he sat down. Orion stood up and began pacing round the living room. "Eileen Snape asked me a very odd question tonight. She saw me step in to protect her son, Severus, from his father."

"Why would you do that though?" Emma asked.

Orion scowled. "The bastard, Tobias that is, hit Severus for playing a game with James and Sirius. He thinks that Severus isn't a good wizard simply because he likes potions more than the wand-based areas of magic."

Charles and Emma frowned. "That doesn't sound very good," Charles observed.

Orion snorted. "And that is the understatement of the year. Severus told me that Tobias is abusive towards both him and his mother, but that Severus himself is more often used as the punching bag."

"So she saw you step in to protect Severus and what, she ask you to be his guardian or something?" Emma asked jokingly. Orion just nodded, sinking down into a chair.

"Yes she did, and I don't know what to do. I have no objections if Severus doesn't but honestly, what grounds does she have to ask that of me. I asked her why she would ask me when she barely knows me and she gave me a list of reasons, mostly centered round my protection of Severus and what I told her regarding the similarity between Tobias and my uncle."

Charles was smirking. "Well that sounds reasonable. Orion, she can nominate you as guardian but the Wizarding Child Protection Service will still check you out to make sure that you're suitable. We need to get you a house if she wants to do this though."

Orion nodded again. "Yes, I had my eye on one that I'm going to check out tomorrow. It's not too expensive, and looks habitable."

Both Charles and Emma smiled. "We'll help Orion. The guardianship thing won't be decided immediately, it's still only an idea. Just relax."

Orion leaned back in his chair and sighed. "I know. It's just a shock to think that I might one day be my Potion Professor's guardian." He sighed, and then headed up to bed, needing to sleep and think about the extraordinary events of that night. As he tossed and turned, his mind kept coming back to one thing, Severus hugging him after he'd healed him. He groaned as he realised that he couldn't turn his back on Severus now, not when he'd already protected him once. Sighing again, he dropped off to sleep, wondering how much more surreal his life was going to become.

Chapter Six: Werewolves and a New Home

The next morning, Orion was deep in negotiations for the house he hoped to buy. It was large, really a small manor rather than a house, two floors with six bedrooms, three bathrooms, a large kitchen and dining room, a medium sized study and large sitting room. The grounds were fairly extensive, with a small lake on the premises which Orion was pleased to see. He liked swimming and was pleased that he didn't have to go far to do it. A forest bordered one edge of the grounds and Orion smiled.

'Plenty of room for Remus to roam in if he should visit round the full moon' he thought as he half listened to the officious land agent, who reminded Orion rather uncomfortably of Percy Weasley.

"Well Mr Potter, do you like it?" the agent finally asked. Orion took in the house once more, noting the neutral cream colored walls and wood paneled floors. He smiled. "Yes I do. What's the price?"

"The price would be seven thousand galleons Mr Potter. This includes installing and activating the Floo, you are in charge of warding it yourself, however you wish. It also includes connecting the plumbing and other such things. Do you wish to buy it?"

Now Orion was in something of a quandary. He had brought around eight thousand galleons with him to the past, all of which had gone into his Gringotts account. He had also cashed a paycheck from the Unspeakables earlier that morning which brought the amount up to about eight thousand seven hundred. If he paid the full price now he would have to wait for a while before his money got back up to a comfortable level again.

The land agent, sensing his dilemma said, "Mr Potter, if you can't pay the full amount now, we can arrange for you to pay a certain amount each week. Would that work better?"

Orion nodded, relieved. After a few more minutes admiring the house, he apparated back to the agent's office and began going through paperwork. Fifteen minutes later he was the proud owner of the house, with an agreement to pay off five hundred galleons each week. At that rate, it would only take him around nine weeks to pay it off. Grinning, he arranged for the Floo to be hooked up later that day, with the address being registered as Marauder Manor, and he apparated back to Potter Manor to tell Charles and Emma the good news.

"So you got it then. Good!" Emma said as Orion practically bounced into the sitting room. He felt much more settled now that he had his own home and was settling into his life as an Unspeakable once more.

"Hey James, I got my new house today," Orion said as James came in, having spotted his uncle through the living room windows.

"Cool. Can I come over? Where is it? Can we have that sleepover at your place?" The questions came tumbling out, James barely pausing for breath between each one.

Chuckling, Orion grabbed James in a headlock and ruffled his hair. "Let me get settled and all equipped with food and stuff first imp, then we'll see about the sleepover. When is it?"

James grinned up at him and replied, "In two weeks. Is that enough time to get settled?"

Orion laughed and nodded, before adding, "As long as your parents, and Sirius' parents, and Severus' parents agree. Oh and Remus' aunt of course."

"YAY!" James yelled and raced off to Floo his friends, presumably to get them to convince their parents to agree.

"Oh the energy of youth," Orion said mournfully, watching James race off.

"So how will you ward the Floo?" Charles asked. Orion frowned.

"Not sure. I'll have a think about it. The address will be Marauder Manor by the way."

"Got it," Charles said just as James raced in.

"Everyone's agreed. Mr Black wants to speak to you though Uncle Orion."

Orion ruffled James' hair once more as he walked to the fireplace and knelt down.

"Orion how are you?" he said cordially. Orion Black smiled.

"Leo, good to see you again. I have no problems with this sleepover, however, could I know your Floo address in case we need to reach you?"

Orion smiled. "Certainly. It's Marauder Manor. I'm moving in sometime this week, and then I'll be all set for a couple of weeks from now to entertain the four of them for the weekend."

"Good, good. Sirius can be a handful at times; don't hesitate to punish him if he needs it."

Orion chuckled as he heard a distinctly mortified, "DAD!" coming from the background. "Don't worry, I'm sure they'll be on their best behavior" he said. He was grinning as the Floo call ended and he rose, stretching the cramps out from his knees. He didn't like Floo calls for precisely that reason; they were very hard on the knees unless you used cushioning charms.

'That's the first thing that's being put down in front of that fireplace' Orion thought as he rejoined his family. James threw his arms round him in a hug, and Orion hugged him back. He'd finally got over the awkwardness of James being his future father, and now smirked to himself when he imagined James and hopefully Lily's reaction when he told them. That was going to be amusing. He shook his head, reaching for the catalogues from shops in Diagon Alley, looking over all the things he'd need to buy. The house wasn't furnished so he was going to spend that afternoon on a shopping spree, with Charles and Emma's help, as they had firmly told him that he was family and family helped each other out like this. He hadn't argued; the Potters were one of the wealthiest old families in the wizarding world, which hadn't really surprised him. What had surprised him was that unlike the Malfoys and Blacks, the Potters didn't flaunt their wealth, and most of it was tied up in investments anyway. The amount of galleons they had though was enough to keep them living comfortably for several hundred years, not to mention the following generations.

"Why are we going shopping?" James asked, upon hearing of the excursion.

Charles rolled his eyes. "We're going to help your uncle outfit his new house. Then we're going to Gringotts to sort out some legal matters before we come home."

James looked a bit put out by this. "But I was going to play with Sirius at his place today," he whined.

His parents looked at him before Emma remarked dryly, "Do you want some cheese with that whine James? No? You can see your friends tomorrow; besides, I thought you'd be happy to help your uncle choose new furniture and things."

James sulked for a bit before grinning as a thought popped into his head. "Can I choose my own room for when I stay with you Uncle Orion?" he asked.

Orion looked at him for a moment. "The other rooms, apart from mine will be guest rooms and will be done up in a variety of neutral colors. I'm afraid that if you want to pick your own room then you'd need to live with me permanently and I doubt your parents would like that, even if I am your uncle."

James pouted but didn't say anything further. He just chatted about which colors would look good together, although Orion drew the line at decorating the entire house in red and gold. He rather preferred green and gold, with cream and blue to offset it in other areas.

The shopping was exhausting, but in the end, Orion had a houseful of new furniture and the colors were exactly as he wanted them to be. The guest rooms were cream colored, and all had single beds, a desk, chair and a table beside the bed, with a small lamp. Orion's bedroom was also done in neutral colors, mostly cream with a hint of blue and gold here and there. Orion was most pleased with the study, he'd deliberately had it done the way his future children had redecorated it a few days before they'd died, green walls, cream colored ceiling and windowsills, and a gold colored carpet with green fringes.

The elder Potters and James went back to Potter Manor and Orion tested out his new Floo system, pleased when it worked first time. He had enough Floo powder for a year, as the stuff didn't expire very fast. After the test call had ended Charles and Emma turned to go outside to spend some time in the sun. James looked at them carefully to make sure they weren't watching before he grabbed a handful of Floo powder from the pot on the mantelpiece. Yelling out "Marauder Manor" he disappeared in a flash of green flame.

Orion spun round to face his fireplace, sending a stunning spell at the unexpected visitor. It took him little less than a second to recognize James and he shook his head, waking him up and holding him firmly by the shoulders.

"What are you doing here James?" he asked, amused but also a little annoyed.

James looked at him sheepishly. "I just wanted to see what your new house looked like Uncle Orion," he replied. Orion rolled his eyes.

"I'll give you and your friends the grand tour when you have the sleepover here. Now you'd better head back home, I'm sure your parents are worried about you."

James took a pinch of Floo Powder and with a resigned look on his face said, "Potter Manor," before disappearing in a flash of green flames.

A few minutes later Orion was talking to Charles via the Floo. "Yes Charles he was here. I accidentally stunned him as he came out of the fireplace so I woke him up and sent him back to you. Is he alright?" Orion replied to Charles' enquiry of whether James' unexpected Floo trip had been successful.

Charles nodded. "Yes but he's currently grounded for the next week, he's not supposed to use the Floo without permission. He's lucky you didn't use a stronger hex."

Orion shook his head. "No he's not. I would stun anyone coming out of my Floo unexpectedly, and then wake them up to question them if I didn't recognize them. I have to finish organizing my papers, and I'd like to talk to you regarding that Gringotts visit you made today. I have a funny feeling it involves me and James."

Charles smirked. "It does Orion, but it's not a conversation to have by Floo. I'll come over tonight; you've got enough by way of food and stuff." Orion chuckled, yes he did, he'd made sure to thoroughly stock his pantry and refrigerator, not to mention his liquor cabinet. He was all set up and loving it already.

Charles ended the conversation and Orion sat in his new armchair in the sitting room and looked round. It felt good to be independent once more, although living with his grandparents and father had been good from the point of view of learning his family history. Smiling, he thought that he now knew where he got his impulsive streak from; James seemed to have it in spades. It would be a few more years yet before his father learnt to curb that, which was perfectly fine from Orion's point of view. Kids needed to be kids, and learning to curb impulsive behavior as one grew older was part of that.

That train of thought led round to kids who didn't have that opportunity, which led to Severus and possibly Remus as well. Orion sat for a long time, just thinking of the unusual request that Eileen Snape had made of him, before deciding that he wasn't going to learn anything else until he talked to her.

"She said to Floo her at Snape Manor when I was all settled," Orion murmured, looking at the time. It was now quite late and Orion realized that he was hungry, even though the Potters had eaten out that night, to compensate for the afternoon of shopping and organizing the house. Fixing himself a snack, he ate and then dropped into bed, taking a moment to marvel at the sheer comfortableness of it, before his eyes shut.

He awoke to the sounds of birds singing and trees rustling in the breeze. He lay there for a few minutes before a slight "pop" indicated that his house elf, which he had purchased the previous day, was standing beside his bed.

"Hello Noddy," he murmured. The elf smiled at him and chirped, "Hello Master Potter, you need to be getting up, you do. Bath is already run and I be making breakfast downstairs if you be telling me what you like?"

Orion deciphered the strange way of talking and then smiled. "Bacon

and eggs with toast and pumpkin juice I think Noddy, and thank you for the bath. I'll be down soon," and with that he got up, stretching slightly as he made his way to the bathroom which held a large bath, large enough for him to float in comfortably. The water was extremely warm, just the way he liked it and Orion sank into it with a groan of contentment. Oh yes, this was nice, he didn't want to leave. It wasn't until a knock at the door and Noddy's voice saying "Breakfast be ready in five minutes Master Potter" that he got out, and drained the water away, along with the bubbles.

Five minutes later Orion was staring at the mound of food on his plate in awe. It seemed that all house elves felt the need to overfeed their masters and when he questioned Noddy on this: "Oh no Master Potter sir, the other Master Potter be telling Noddy what Master's eating habits are like so Noddy can start on right foot with Master."

Shaking his head, Orion nonetheless felt very full when he'd finished. Instructing Noddy to not disturb him until lunch was ready; he went to Floo Eileen Snape, making a mental note to go to Remus' house later that afternoon as it was the full moon that night.

"Snape Manor" he said as he threw the powder into the flames and stuck his head in, coughing slightly. He hated doing this; telephones would be so much easier.

Eileen answered the call and her face broke out into a relieved smile. "Orion, I'm so glad you called. I was beginning to think you wouldn't," she said.

Orion smiled. "I said I would and I always keep my word Eileen. Now, how about you and I discuss that idea you dropped on me two nights ago."

Eileen blushed. "Yes, I suppose it must have come as a shock to you. I'm sorry for that, by the way, I could have chosen a better time but I didn't know if I'd see you again. What do you want to know?"

Orion's answer was blunt. "Why me? And why ask me now, when both you and your husband are still alive? I know he's a violent guy but couldn't you divorce him and raise Severus yourself?"

Eileen shook her head. "No. A clause in the marriage contract forbids me from leaving but it doesn't prevent me from legally terminating my parental rights to Severus in favor of another guardian should circumstances warrant it."

Seeing Orion's raised eyebrows Eileen elaborated. "Tobias has threatened to kill me twice already, I've been to the Wizarding Child Protection Agency, known as the WCPA and they said to nominate another guardian. I provided Pensieve memories of the way he's treated both me and Sev, so there is no way that he will be left with his father. But, he needs someone to look after him."

Orion nodded slowly. "I see. Are there any legal documents I have to sign, and when would you want me to take guardianship of Severus? Also, have you discussed it with him yet?"

Eileen nodded. "I have discussed it with him, which is why I'm so glad the sleepover will be at your house, so Severus can begin to get to know you and get more comfortable with you. That way, if the worst happens, he won't feel as though you're a complete stranger to him. I know you work at the Ministry but..."

Orion interrupted. "I work quite flexible hours Eileen; I can easily rearrange my schedule if I need to. I'm going to see one of Severus' friends today, Remus Lupin, he's coming to the sleepover as well even though it's not for a while. May I ask where your husband is?"

"He's out working, don't know where," was Eileen's reply.

Orion shrugged, although she couldn't see it. "Well as long as he won't interrupt our chat. Would you mind if I spoke with Severus for a

bit? It would give us a chance to begin bonding."

"You can come through if you wish," Eileen said and Orion stepped through the fire, managing not to stumble for once. He looked up as he heard a noise at the door to the living room where he found himself.

"Hello Severus," he said, holding out his hand and smiling.

Severus came forward and shook his hand, looking up at him with a mixture of apprehension and curiosity. "I hear you're going to be my new guardian if my father hurts Mum or me again," he said. Orion sat down on a nearby sofa and pulled Severus down to sit with him. In the process his arm ended up round the boy's shoulders but surprisingly Severus didn't pull away.

"Well, not quite. If something happens that means your Mum can't take care of you, then I will step in as guardian. I promise that your father will not get custody of you if something should happen. Your mother has some legal papers drawn up which will make my guardianship legal if they are needed. I do have to ask though, are you comfortable with this?"

Severus looked at the arm that was currently encircling his shoulders and then burrowed deeper into Orion's side. "Yes. For some reason I feel safe with you, it's probably related to you protecting me the other night but still, I do feel safe."

Orion smiled. "That's nice to know. Now, what do you like to do besides Potions?"

After a few initially awkward moments, Severus began to loosen up a bit and Orion told him stories of his life in return, being careful to edit out names and any reference to dates. He didn't want Severus to blurt out anything that might be able to give away what time he was from, even though the fact that he was a time-traveler was apparently

common knowledge anyway. After an hour or two, Orion got up to stretch his legs. Severus came with him, still in amazement over the current story.

"So you and your friend really flew a car to Hogwarts? Wow, didn't you get expelled?"

Orion laughed. "No. We did get detention though. The tree we crashed into nearly killed us; it wasn't at all the triumphant arrival we'd planned."

Severus laughed at that, picturing the crash in his mind. Orion smiled to himself, he really liked Severus, and was happy that he'd agreed to take guardianship of him if the worst should happen. Severus soon grew tired and went back to the house, with Orion following as he needed to sign the documents that would make all this legal.

"Thank you Orion," Eileen said as he finished signing them. "I'll owl these to the agency and they'll hold them for use if necessary. Does Sev know you're going?"

Orion shrugged. "Sev," he called.

A clatter from upstairs followed his call and then Severus appeared at the door. "Yes Orion?" After two hours, Orion had finally managed to make Severus comfortable with using his name after stating that sir made him feel old and Mr Potter made him think of Charles.

"I'm leaving now but I'll see you at the sleepover in a week or so. If you or your mother need a break from here for a bit before then though then you're more than welcome at my place OK? Floo address is Marauder Manor."

"OK Orion. See you later," Severus was smiling as he said this and even dared to give Orion a quick hug. Orion returned it warmly and then stepped into the Floo, leaving Severus to stare after him.

"I like him Mum," was the only comment he made before retreating upstairs again. Eileen could only shake her head; she was pleased that Severus liked Orion but part of her wished that this wasn't necessary, even though it would give Severus the best chance at a happy life. She quickly folded up the legal documents and attached them to her owl, sending the bird off with instructions to wait if the WCPA wanted to reply.

Later that afternoon, Orion found himself standing in the living room of Remus' home, facing Remus' aunt who, despite having given him permission to come, still didn't seem pleased to have him there. Firmly shoving memories of his own aunt away, Orion greeted her pleasantly and then asked where Remus was.

"He's currently locked in his cell, I don't want him running round outside thank you very much, not today at least," she snapped.

"His cell?" Orion enquired, hoping that it wasn't what it sounded like.

"I chain him up on the day of the full moon, just in case his wolf side decides to make the change early. I don't want to become like him just because he bit me."

Orion now had to put some serious effort into controlling his temper. "Yvonne, he will not be dangerous until the moon rises tonight. I wish to speak with him and being outside in the fresh air might do him good. He won't need to be restrained tonight either, I'll be with him and you can lock the doors if that makes you feel safer."

Yvonne looked undecided for a moment before she finally shrugged. "Fine. Do what you want with him, but it's not my fault if he bites you. I've got some things to do in the village; you can look after him for the rest of the afternoon and tonight. I'll see you later."

She Flooded away and Orion was left to find where Remus was

imprisoned. Changing into Shadow he used the wolf's keen sense of smell to pick up the young werewolf's scent. It wasn't long before he found it in a small room in the basement.

Changing back he went to Remus and drew his wand. Seeing Remus' eyes widen he quickly put a reassuring hand on his shoulder. "Easy Remus, do you remember me? Orion Potter?"

Remus nodded and replied, "Yes, Mr Potter. My aunt said that you'd be coming to help me with my transformation."

Orion nodded. "Yes that's right. Your aunt has left me in charge of you for the rest of the day, and for tonight. I'm going to release you from these chains, they're not necessary and I hate seeing you like this."

Remus nodded and waited patiently while Orion flicked his wand and made his restraints vanish. He then stood up with Orion's help and stretched. "Thanks sir, I was getting cramped."

Orion smirked. "First of all, sir makes me feel old. And Mr Potter makes me think that Charles is somewhere nearby. Call me Orion."

Remus thought about this for a second and then smiled. "OK, er, Orion."

Orion smiled. "Good. Now, what do you say to getting out of here? I don't like being underground very much."

Remus practically flew up the stairs, followed by Orion. Once they were in the living room again Remus flopped down on the couch. "So, what's your animagus form's name?"

Orion smiled. "Remus, meet Shadow," he said before transforming into his wolf form once more. Remus' eyes widened as the large black wolf walked up to him and then laughed when he was pushed

back against the couch and licked.

"Ah that tickles," he chuckled as Orion transformed back into himself and sat next to him.

"Shadow has taken on a full grown werewolf and won so I don't think your wolf will be a problem," Orion said, watching Remus to see what his reaction would be.

Remus shuddered. "I know I can't escape it but I don't like it Orion. I don't like transforming into a monster once a month. It's painful and everyone would hate me if they found out what I was. Why do you not hate me?"

Orion slowly put an arm round Remus' shoulders, giving him time to pull away if he didn't want the comfort. When Remus relaxed into his embrace, Orion pulled him against his side in a hug.

"First of all, not all wizards are prejudiced against werewolves Remus. My father's best friend was a werewolf and my father and his other friends became animagi to spend the full moons with him. When I grew old enough and became an animagus, I too ran with him."

Tightening the hug a bit, he continued. "One thing I learnt from my father's friend was that if he embraced the change, if he didn't fight it, it wasn't as painful. Also, if you name your wolf side it makes it easier to accept as a part of you."

Remus brightened. "OK. I've never tried that before, my aunt always said that I was a monster. My parents, they didn't know how to cope. My father even got the silver spoons melted down to make bullets in case I escaped. Then he and my mother decided they couldn't cope and I was given to my aunt."

He sounded very bitter when he finished with, "And she has never liked me. She takes care of me because she has to but she doesn't

like it."

Orion enfolded him in a hug as Remus broke down. When the sobs had died down to the occasional snuffle, Orion handed him a tissue. "I know how that feels Remus. My parents died when I was a year old. I was supposed to be raised by my godfather but that didn't happen for reasons I won't go into. I was sent to my aunt, who hated my mother for being magical and hated me for being my mother's child. She and my uncle tried to beat and starve the magic out of me and when that didn't work; they told everyone I went to a centre for incurably criminal boys. It was horrible."

Remus looked at him, wide eyed. "Wow. How did you not grow up bitter and twisted?" He immediately blushed as he realized that it was a very personal question.

Orion merely chuckled. "I had friends and spent some summers with my friend and his family, so I knew that they were wrong to treat me the way they did. If I hadn't had that then I could easily have been bitter and twisted about it."

Remus nodded and then twisted round, stretching the muscles in his back. "Do you want to go for a walk, or have a drink or something?" he asked, getting up.

Orion shrugged. "A drink would be nice, water if you don't mind, and then yes, I think a walk would be good."

Remus grinned and went into the kitchen. The sound of running water preceded his return with two glasses of water, one of which he handed to Orion. "Thanks" Orion said as he drank it, refreshing his rather dry throat. Once both glasses were empty, Orion banished them back to the kitchen and Remus led him outside.

After a pleasant walk in the forest that was near Remus' home, they returned to find it was early evening. Yvonne was back and Orion

very nearly snarled as Remus abruptly stiffened. He had dinner with the two of them, chatting about inconsequential things. Yvonne didn't look any happier than she had earlier and Remus didn't seem to want to talk either. It was a relief to both Remus and Orion when they headed outside, although Remus still seemed sad as they both heard the door lock firmly behind them.

"Sometimes I have nightmares that I'll wake up and she'll have abandoned me," Remus muttered as they waited for the moon to rise. Orion sat down on the grass with him, letting him talk. Remus pulled at a blade of grass and continued moodily, "She threatened to make me clean the rest of the silver once. She knows what effect it has on werewolves."

"Has she?" Orion asked, appalled. Remus shook his head.

"No, but I wish she'd be nicer to me. I don't really blame her but it wasn't my fault that I was bitten. It hurts that she isn't supportive."

He moved closer to Orion and leant against his shoulder. "Thank you for helping me like this. Will you be here next month?"

Orion smiled. "I'll be here every month unless you tell me you don't want me here Remus. My house also has a forest at its edge so if you want to come over at the full moon you'll be welcome there too."

Remus smiled. "Cool. Am I still allowed at the sleepover?"

Orion nodded. "Of course. Have you thought of a name for your wolf yet?" He shifted away from Remus, giving the boy room to transform as he was bathed in moonlight.

Remus nodded, and gasped out, "Moony" as the transformation began. It was shorter than the adult transformation as he was smaller, but no less painful. Orion swiftly changed as well, becoming Shadow in an instant.

The wolf watched as Moony struggled to his feet, looking around in wonder, seeming uncertain at being outside. The pup then noticed Shadow and bounced up to him, whining questioningly.

Shadow examined Moony while Moony was examining him, and then gave a wolfish smirk as Moony jumped away, wagging his tail, inviting Shadow to play. The older wolf soon won the impromptu mock fight that took place and dashed after the pup when Moony took off into the forest.

Moony came to an abrupt stop as he smelt humans nearby. The werewolf dropped to his belly, creeping forwards, searching out his prey. Shadow came up behind him, and saw the danger. The humans turned out to be a witch and wizard in their teens that had come out to the woods for a snog session. They only realized the danger when Moony leapt at them, his lust for human prey very strong. Shadow leapt to intercept him and the two wolves hit the ground only a foot from the surprised couple. Shadow threw Moony off him and stood between him and the couple, snarling warningly.

Moony lunged but Shadow grabbed him by the scruff of the neck and threw him into a tree. Taking advantage of Moony's dazed state, Orion transformed back into himself and snapped, "Either get out of here or get up a tree. He's only a pup but if he bites you it will still have the same effect as an adult werewolf's bite. Move, now!"

He hastily transformed back into Shadow as Moony attempted to take him down. One slash of his fangs into Moony's shoulder convinced the pup to back down, that and the fact that Shadow was now standing over him, having knocked him off his feet. Moony whimpered as Shadow growled at him, and tucked his tail between his legs. Satisfied that Moony would obey him for the moment, and seeing that the witch and wizard had disappeared from the area, Shadow led Moony back home, being careful to watch him in case he disappeared on any more "hunting" excursions.

Once they were back in the Lupin's back garden, Shadow flopped down, and watched Moony exploring his surroundings. When he ventured too close to the woods Shadow growled again, causing Moony to whimper apologetically and back away from the trees. The older wolf gave a soft whuff of approval, he would let Moony roam the woods at Hogwarts and if he came over to Marauder Manor, but not before.

Once Moony had got tired of exploring he laid down next to Shadow, who was curled up but alert to any movements nearby. He gave a wolfish smirk as Moony relaxed against his side and went to sleep, the earlier exertion obviously having taken its toll. Noticing the wound on Moony's shoulder left by his teeth, Shadow licked it, not sorry for inflicting it but wanting to help it heal all the same. Moony didn't stir, and Shadow finally dropped his head to the ground as well.

Inside the house, Yvonne had been watching the interaction of the two wolves, and she sighed. She didn't like her nephew, true, but she did want him to be able to embrace his magical heritage as a wizard. Maybe this wizard, Orion, would be able to help him in a way she couldn't. Shaking her head she went up to bed, not wanting to see one of her worst nightmares curled up on the lawn looking for the entire world like a pet dog.

Shadow's ears pricked up as he saw the sun begin to rise. He looked over at Moony and winced at the howl of pain from the pup as he began to change back into Remus. Once the change was complete, Shadow transformed back into Orion again.

Orion hurriedly covered Remus up, the transformation having ripped his clothes up pretty well. That done, he ran his wand over the boy, checking for any internal injuries caused by the transformation. Finding nothing except exhaustion and bruises, along with the half healed bite from Shadow on his shoulder, Orion picked Remus up and walked to the back door.

He found it open and frowned. Extending his magic, he did a silent magical sweep of the house, designed to search out any living beings. He found one upstairs and quickly ascertained that it was Yvonne. He carried Remus into the living room and put him down on the sofa. Remus shivered a bit as Orion put him down and woke up.

"Orion? What's going on? Where's Aunt Yvonne?"

Orion shook his head. "Upstairs. Just stay here Remus, I'll go wake your aunt and then we can have breakfast OK. Just stay on the sofa until I get back."

Seeing Remus' nod of agreement, Orion went to wake up Yvonne. He hoped that she was in a more agreeable mood today. As it turned out she wasn't. Breakfast was a strained affair and Orion left as soon as possible, Remus walking him to the front gate.

The next two months passed reasonably peaceably, with Orion spending each full moon with Remus, and each morning afterwards he caught Yvonne looking between them with a speculative look in her eyes. In between full moons Remus spent time with him as he came over to play with James. Severus also came over a lot of the time under the pretence of working on his homework with James and Remus. The fact that he could spend more time getting to know Orion and vice versa was a bonus. Orion was pleased to see a bond beginning to grow between Severus and Remus, separate to the bond that existed between them, James and Sirius.

When Remus and Orion entered Remus' house on the morning after the next full moon they noticed that the house was empty. They scanned the room and Remus choked when he saw the note left in the middle of the dining room table.

"Orion? Look at that," he whispered, pointing towards the note. Orion read it and then silently handed it to Remus, who had sat down on

the couch. Reading it quickly, Remus' shoulders slumped.

"She's gone, she's abandoned me," he whispered.

Chapter Seven: Unexpected Parenthood

Orion couldn't believe his ears. He'd known that Yvonne didn't like Remus but to abandon him like she had? It was unbelievable! He sat down next to the young werewolf and they read the note again.

Dear Remus

It will probably surprise you that I started this note that way. It was never you personally that I disliked, it was your werewolf side that I was afraid and resentful of. When I was a girl my family was lost to a werewolf attack; werewolves have always been my worst fear since that time. I was at a friend's when the attack happened so I was spared. My parents and my brother were all mauled to death though. Fenrir Greyback was behind it, the same werewolf who bit you apparently. I'm sorry that I never treated you the way I should have done, I let my fear get the better of me and I'm sorry.

I have left papers at the Wizarding Child Protection Agency at the Ministry for Mr Potter to sign. These will give him custody and full guardianship of you until you turn of age. If you don't wish him to be your guardian then you will have to find someone else, maybe the rest of the Potters, or another family. I am truly sorry Remus, that I can't give you what Mr Potter can, acceptance and caring, and maybe a family. Please don't think too harshly of me, although I realize that I have no right to ask that of you.

I wish you well

Love

Yvonne.

Remus bowed his head and his shoulders shook as he broke down. Orion hurriedly salvaged the letter before Remus' tears could smudge the ink. He didn't object when Remus turned to him for

comfort, instead he opened his arms and let Remus cuddle up to him, sobbing his heart out. He wondered if the sentiments expressed by Yvonne could be equally well applied to Petunia in the future – after all, magic had taken her sister and her family from her, it was not impossible to imagine her hatred of him being more a hatred of magic in general rather than anything truly personal.

"Let's get some food first Remus, then we can deal with the Ministry. Do you want me as your guardian?" he asked gently. Remus turned red-rimmed eyes up to him and then hesitantly nodded. "What, what will happen if I do something wrong though?" he asked.

Orion tightened his hold and replied, keeping his tone gentle, "I will never physically hurt you Remus. Should you do something wrong you will probably be grounded or other things like that. No restriction on food or anything else, and all the silver will be locked away where you can't accidentally come into contact with it. Alright?"

Remus nodded and then burrowed back into Orion's robes, still upset but gradually realizing that Orion wasn't going to go anywhere. He looked up with interest as Orion pulled an odd looking device from one of his robe pockets.

"What's that?" he asked. His new guardian smiled at him.

"Communication device that I use at work. I just need to check in with my boss. Hold on."

He flipped the top open and spoke into it. "Croaker." A couple of seconds later his boss' voice came through.

"Hunter. What is it?"

"I'm coming into the Ministry, I was helping one of my nephew's friends last night and his aunt has gone and done something that has left me in a quandary. I was hoping that you could let my team and I

do fulltime research and recovery duty regarding those ancient items I told you about until they're all accounted for."

Croaker thought for a moment and then replied, "Of course but if something comes up I reserve the right to recall your team to active duty. May I enquire as to the nature of this quandary?"

Orion frowned. "Sorry boss, not like this. I'll tell you when I see you, which should be soon, after I've had some breakfast."

Croaker nodded understandingly. "Of course Hunter. I'll let your team know to expect you, and just so you know, we haven't had any luck on those items as yet."

"Well they are hidden very well," was Orion's reply before he snapped the top of the communicator shut. He looked down to see Remus looking very confused.

"I'll explain later pup, but for now, we both need to eat. Let's raid the kitchen." He led Remus into the kitchen and then stood back to see what Remus would produce in the way of food. He smirked as Remus eventually came up with the ingredients for pancakes, bacon and eggs, and soon they were tucking into a filling breakfast. Remus seemed to regain his normal demeanor while they were eating, although Orion knew that it would still take some time for Remus to recover from this shocking turn of events even if he seemed calm at that moment.

"Er, pup?" Remus questioned once he'd eaten. Orion looked startled for a second and then blushed slightly. "It's what my godfather used to call me when we discovered that Shadow was one of my animagus forms. I absolutely refused to be called "Woofie" or something equally ridiculous so we settled for "pup." If you don't like it then I won't use it, it just slipped out."

Remus reached across the table and placed his hand on top of

Orion's. "It's OK, I was just surprised. I kind of like it, like a nickname. You can also call me Moony if you want as well."

Orion grinned. "Oh good. Moony or pup it is then. Now that we've eaten, do you want to go sort this Ministry thing out now? We can do whatever you want to do Remus."

Remus looked undecided. "Um, can we go to the Ministry?" He squeaked slightly as Orion pulled him against his side. "Of course we can, now hold on tight."

Remus obeyed and then felt an odd sensation, like being squeezed through a tube. He frowned, he didn't like it very much, and then it stopped. He stared in shock at the different surroundings.

"Um, Orion, where are we?" he asked. Orion smiled. "At my work. I Apparated us here to avoid questions from other Ministry workers. Also, where I work happens to be the closest to the WCPA office."

He led Remus through the Department of Mysteries. He had swiftly pulled the hood of his cloak up and charmed the interior so no one could see his face. He also had cast a mild glamour charm over Remus. "Now, you can't tell anyone that I work here Moony, if anyone asks you where I work, just say the Ministry."

"What happens if they want details?" Remus questioned, his eyes almost popping out of his head as he tried to see everything at once. Orion smirked. "Just say that I do research on ancient artifacts."

"You're an Unspeakable?" Remus questioned. Orion nodded.

"Yes, but no one here except my boss knows my real name. My team, and the rest of the Ministry, knows me as Hunter, and that's the way it will stay for now. Here's the lift, we're going up two floors and then to the right."

He and Remus quickly moved into the lift. As soon as they were headed upwards, Orion removed the charm on the hood of his cloak – it wasn't his Unspeakable one so the charm was temporary, and removed the glamour from Remus, who looked very confused.

"The spells on us while we were down there were to hide our identities," Orion explained as the lift continued its upward journey. "Unspeakables don't generally hide their faces around other Unspeakables, they just use code names. With regard to the Ministry, well, people may know we're Unspeakables but we don't use our true names except with our families and of course our boss."

"But if the Unspeakables know what you look like anyway then why did you hide yourself and cast a glamour charm on me?" Remus questioned.

"Because if they saw me with you, it wouldn't take much for them to make a few discreet enquiries with the WCPA and then they'd know my name. I'd rather that didn't happen," Orion replied as the lift halted. Remus just shrugged, he didn't mind overly much, it was just a part of his guardian's work that he didn't understand and didn't truly care to know about. Even at eight years old, he understood the value of keeping secrets.

They walked out of the lift and along one of the sparsely decorated corridors into the offices of the Wizarding Child Protection Agency, or WCPA. Here there was lots of decoration, meant to make kids feel more at ease with their environment. Orion spotted a friendly looking young witch and made his way over to her, Remus following behind him.

"Er, I'm here to see about gaining custody of Remus Lupin," Orion said when the witch looked at him. Her gaze fell on Remus and then she brightened up. "Of course, and you would be Mr Orion Potter am I right?" she asked as she retrieved the necessary forms. Orion nodded and sat in a chair opposite her. Remus sat next to him and

he gently squeezed his hand, sensing how nervous Remus was.

"I'm Amelia Lockhart, and you must be Remus," she said, holding out her hand. Remus shook it and murmured "Hello," before resuming his quiet study of the office. Amelia seemed to see a lot of this because she didn't comment and instead laid the forms out in front of Orion.

"You seem to be fairly popular when it comes to this sort of thing Mr Potter, first Eileen Snape and now Yvonne Lupin. Who next I wonder?" she said with a disarming smile.

Orion frowned. "I have no idea Ms Lockhart, however since I was nominated, I can hardly refuse. Nor do I want to," he added, seeing Remus' look of worry that Orion might abandon him too. Remus didn't relax until Orion put an arm round him and whispered, "I'm not going anywhere Remus, all I meant was that this was a bit unexpected. OK?" Remus nodded and leaned into the hug.

Amelia hid a smile; she thought that the pair in front of her would make a good family. Orion was looking at the forms with a frown. "Ms Lockhart, these are adoption forms. Are they the same as what I signed for Severus?"

Amelia shook her head. "No Mr Potter, the ones you signed for Severus only give you custody of him, they weren't adoption papers. Remus' aunt apparently wanted him to have a proper family, rather than just a guardian. You can sign adoption papers for Severus if it becomes necessary and you both want it later on."

Orion nodded. "Would you mind giving us a minute?" he requested. Amelia vacated her office, seeing that the two wizards needed to talk. Orion swiveled in his chair to face Remus. "Remus, do you know what will happen if I sign these forms?" he asked.

Remus frowned. "I think so. You'd be my Dad then wouldn't you?"

Legally I mean?"

Orion nodded. "Basically, yes. There is a part in there about name changes, it means that if I sign them then you can either choose to keep your name as Remus John Lupin, or change it to Remus John Potter or something like that."

Remus frowned again. "Uh, I'd like to keep Remus, it's a cool name, but what about my middle name? I mean, it's my father's name, and I don't really want to change it."

Orion smiled. "Do you want to exchange Lupin for Potter though? You can have two middle names if you want as well."

Remus thought for a minute. "Two middle names and hyphenate the last names?" he suggested. Orion smiled. "OK. Remus John, something, Potter-Lupin then?"

Remus smiled. "What name do you think would go well with the first two names?"

"Hmm. Remus Daniel John Potter-Lupin?" Orion suggested. Remus wrinkled his nose.

"On second thought, I think keep the Remus Daniel John bit and drop the Lupin. So it would be Remus Daniel John Potter. That sounds better."

Orion nodded. "Remus Daniel John Potter it is then," he said and picked up the quill, filling in the forms. He then signed them and handed Remus the quill so he could sign in the appropriate places as well, after reading the forms thoroughly first and questioning Orion so he could be sure that he understood what he was signing.

When the forms were signed, Amelia came back in and smiled when she read the name change. "Alright. There's just one more thing we

need to sort out. We contacted Charles and Emma Potter, and Eileen Snape and anyone else we could think of to ask as character witnesses but we do need to set up a meeting and an inspection in a few months just to see that everything's going well. It's the law I'm afraid," she said, seeing worry reappear in Remus' eyes while Orion seemed resigned.

"What about this as a compromise. I have no doubt that you dug up my rather interesting way of arriving in the community so if you can give me your word that the things I show you remain confidential then I am willing to show you memories of my family before they were killed. So you can satisfy yourself that I am a good parent," Orion said with little expression on his face.

Amelia blinked. "We hadn't thought of that Mr Potter, but if you're sure? We will keep everything strictly confidential I assure you."

Orion nodded. "Then bring on the Pensieve, or get a Legilemens in here and I'll willingly show them my memories."

Amelia faltered slightly but went to get one of the Ministry's top Legilemens. Orion stood as he entered and shook his hand before sitting down and lowering his shields obligingly. The other wizard was good, and very gentle in his probing, looking at everything from the time of Orion's children's births through to the day they all died. When he pulled out Orion was fighting a losing battle to keep his emotions in check, he'd relived the memories as the wizard was watching them. He started when he felt a pair of arms wrap round him.

"It's OK Dad, I'm here," Remus said earnestly and Orion laughed although it was a watery sounding one. A few more minutes passed while the wizard gave Amelia his opinion that Orion would be a good father to Remus and Orion used the time to bring his emotions under control once more.

"OK you two, everything's all done. You can leave," Amelia said as Orion and Remus stood to leave. "We'll contact you by owl to arrange the inspection," she added as they left.

Once they were free of the office, Remus looked at his new father. Orion felt the scrutiny and smiled down at him. "Let's go home Remus," he said softly, and Apparated the two of them back to Marauder Manor.

When they got there, Remus looked round in wonder. "Wow Dad it's big," he said, before looking uncertainly at Orion. Yes, Orion was now his adoptive father but he'd called him Dad twice without knowing if he was allowed to.

Orion guessed what was going through his mind and smiled. "You're allowed to call me Dad, Remus; it's what I hoped you would call me. I'm surprised that you've taken to it so easily to be truthful."

Remus shrugged and then launched himself at Orion. Orion caught him and held onto him as Remus started thanking him repeatedly. Finally he managed to get a word in edgeways and Remus stopped.

"Do you want to choose your room, and then we can decorate it however you wish," he asked. Remus' eyes lit up and he was off up the stairs. Orion followed him up. "The room at the end of the hall is mine, all others are currently guest rooms until you choose one of them to be yours," he said and watched with a smile as Remus looked in the five rooms available and finally chose one about halfway down the left hand side. Orion smiled and walked in behind his new son, ready to help decorate it however Remus wanted it."

'Oh hell that hurt' he thought, feeling a brief pang of loss as the memories of his other three children surfaced again. He shoved them away, he refused to lose himself in the past – or was it the future? – now. It wasn't fair to Remus.

What followed was a marathon session of redecorating that ended with the walls being red, the carpet gold, and the furniture rearranged to suit Remus' tastes. Finally, when Orion was exhausted, Remus announced that he was satisfied. The ceiling had also changed; Remus had heard of the Great Hall ceiling at Hogwarts and wanted his ceiling to do the same. This was what had led to the exhaustion on Orion's part, the charm was a tricky one to cast, but he'd finally got it right and the ceiling was reflecting a bright warm day.

"Uh, Dad, didn't you say you had to meet your boss when we were at the Ministry?" Remus asked as Orion flopped into the chair across from the bed.

Orion stared at Remus and then groaned. "Yes you're right. Oh Merlin, I'd better Floo him and get him to come here."

One Floo call later and Remus was being introduced to his Dad's boss. Orion put an arm round his shoulders and said, "Croaker, this is my new son, Remus. I apologise for not meeting you at the Ministry, however we wanted to get home. Remus, this is Croaker, my boss at the Ministry."

Remus and Croaker shook hands and then Orion sent Remus off with the mission of exploring the manor. As soon as he'd disappeared, Orion fixed Croaker with a firm look. "His aunt abandoned him this morning, chose me to be his guardian. I couldn't refuse."

Croaker nodded. "I have nothing against him Hunter, there's no need to be defensive. I've told your team that they're on research duty, they'll be meeting you at your convenience to discuss those items you wanted to find."

After checking for any listening charms or sharp young ears, Croaker asked, "Has this Voldemort made all his Horcruxes yet?"

Orion shrugged. "I don't know but I do know a spell to detect them, if he hasn't started making them then he soon will and I and the rest of the Wolves will destroy them, and then him."

Croaker gripped his shoulder. "Don't die in the process, you might have come back to the past with one mission but you've got another equally important one now. Don't allow one to ruin the other."

Orion smirked. "I have no intention of doing anything of the sort. See you later."

Croaker vanished through the Floo, leaving Orion to stand staring into the fire briefly before a crash from upstairs and a yell of "DAD," alerted him to trouble. He ran upstairs to find Remus on the floor, buried beneath a pile of sheets and one of the paintings.

"Uh, they just fell out of the cupboard and then I knocked into the painting," Remus said sheepishly as Orion pulled the sheets off him and put the painting back on the wall with a spell.

"It's alright Remus, I did say you could explore the place. There are a couple of rooms that you're not allowed to enter except in certain situations though, OK. One of them is my study which is next to the lounge, and the other is my bedroom. The study is out of bounds unless I'm with you, or have given you permission to retrieve something from there. The reason for that is that I occasionally bring work stuff home with me and some of it can be dangerous." The other reason was that he also had his Pensieve with all his memories of the future in it but he didn't say that, and the Pensieve was locked up anyway.

"And your bedroom?" Remus asked.

Orion smiled. "Well, I won't go into your room while you're not there so I expect the same courtesy. The exception to this rule is during the night. If you need me for anything, and I do mean anything, you can

come and wake me. I won't be annoyed, if you need help then ask for it, I will always help if I can. The other exception is again, if I ask you to get something from there. Got those two sorted?"

Remus nodded. "The other rooms are OK though?" he said. Orion shrugged. "If we have guests over then their rooms will be under the same rule as my room is, but until we do then all the rest of the rooms are yours to explore in. Just be careful in the kitchen, we don't want to upset Noddy."

Remus nodded. "Thanks for this Dad," he said. Orion stopped and looked at him.

"Remus, before I came here, I had three children, and even though they and my wife died not that long ago, I found myself missing having kids around the place. It is I who should be thanking you, for allowing me to adopt you."

Remus just smiled and hugged Orion again, a hug which was returned in full. They separated and continued on the tour of the manor, with Remus looking round at everything in wonder. He gaped at the large forest bordering the garden and then looked at his father. "Lots of room for Moony," he quipped. Orion nodded.

"Yes, that's what I thought too." He looked concerned as Remus sat down, his eyes going distant. "What is it?" he asked.

Remus shrugged. "That lady in the WCPA office, she mentioned Severus and something about you being his guardian. Why did you become his guardian?"

Orion put an arm round his son's shoulders. "Remus, I bumped into Severus' mother a couple of months ago at a party and she asked me to be his guardian should something happen to her."

"Why?" Remus asked. Orion looked up at the ceiling. "Because

Severus' father is, uh, not very nice towards either him or his mother. He was going to hurt Severus simply for playing a game with James and Sirius and I stepped in to protect Severus from him. Severus' mother saw this and thought that I'd be able to protect and raise Severus should something happen to her."

Remus was quiet. "Oh. And, would you, um, you know," Sensing what Remus was thinking Orion turned to face him. "Remus listen very carefully to me OK. No matter what happens with Severus, you will still be my son. I mentioned just before that I used to have three children, if Severus ends up living with us then he will probably end up being like your brother. I have more than enough love and affection for both of you, you won't have to compete with him, and he won't have to compete with you. Alright?"

Remus nodded. "Alright Dad. It's just that this is still very new."

Orion nodded and hugged him again, smiling when he heard Remus say, "I've always wanted a brother."

Later that day, they were both in the lounge when Remus looked up at an odd chime from the direction of the fire. "Dad, is that the Floo?" he asked.

Orion had heard the chime too and he nodded. "Yes it is. I wonder who could be calling at this time," he murmured as he went to answer it. He had his answer as James' head appeared in the flames.

"Hi James, what are you doing? Aren't you still grounded?" Orion asked, referring to a prank that James had pulled on him that Charles and Emma had taken exception to. James blushed and muttered, "No. Dad wants to know if you'll come over for dinner tomorrow night, he wants to discuss something with you."

"Could you put your Dad on then, I have something to ask him too," Orion requested. James withdrew and then Charles was looking at

Orion. "Hello Orion, how have things been?" he asked.

Orion smiled. "Good enough thanks. Would you object to another extra person – I'd like to introduce my adopted son to you, although James already knows him."

Charles looked shocked. "Adopted son – when and who did you adopt?" he asked. Orion laughed and gestured for Remus to stand next to him. "Charles, meet Remus Potter, formerly Remus Lupin, my new son, and I adopted him this morning."

Charles smiled in delight. "Welcome to the family Remus. We'd be delighted to have you over. Ouch, James, stop that," he said turning to speak to James who was just out of view. "We'll see you tomorrow night, round seven then," he said, turning back to Orion, who nodded in confirmation. The Floo died soon after and Orion and Remus returned to their seats.

"I'd forgotten that I was now part of the Potter family," Remus admitted with a smile.

Orion just chuckled. "I hadn't, I was just looking for a good time to introduce you as my son and this is the perfect opportunity."

Remus grinned at him and then said, "I wonder what James' reaction will be, having one of his friends technically being his cousin." Orion smirked back, although he was thinking of a future time when the truth came out. What would be both their reactions to learning that in the now very confused family tree, Remus was technically James' grandchild.

Remus laughed when he saw a spark of mischief in his Dad's eyes and then threw a pillow at him. Caught by surprise, Orion nonetheless threw it back and father and son engaged in a pillow fight that was interrupted by the arrival of Noddy.

"Dinner will be soon Master Potter," he said, surveying the lounge, which had become a bit disheveled. Orion and Remus looked at him and then at each other, before looking round the lounge and seeing what it must look like to the poor elf.

"OK Noddy, thank you. We'll, heh, we'll be along in a moment," Orion replied, chuckling as he flicked his wand, putting the lounge back to rights. He held out a hand to Remus, who took it, still laughing from the fight.

"I win," Remus said exhilaration shining in his eyes.

Orion shook his head. "You win? Not a chance pup, I had you beat fair and square." Remus shook his head in reply and the two had a friendly argument about it all the way to the dining room.

The next evening, Remus tumbled out of the Floo in Potter Manor, followed by Orion, who rolled as he came out and then dusted himself off. "Hi James," they said in unison. James was staring at Remus and Orion in shock.

"Uh hi Uncle Orion, hi Remus. You never told me he adopted you!" he said in an accusatory tone to Remus.

Remus just shrugged. "It was yesterday James, I'm still getting used to it myself," he replied. Orion came up behind them and ruffled their hair.

"It's only been one day James; he couldn't have told you any sooner. Let it go," he advised and James shrugged before grabbing Remus' hand. "Let's go cousin," he said and dragged Remus to the lounge, where Charles and Emma were waiting for them.

Chuckling at James' antics, Orion followed, pleased to see Charles and Emma immediately embracing Remus and welcoming him to the family. Once they saw he was there, Charles came up and hugged

him too.

"Congratulations," he said, before adding in a lower tone, "how's it been, adjusting and all?"

Orion shrugged. "Good so far, it's only been a day. Give us time."

Charles nodded and then led the newly enlarged family to the dining room for dinner. Over the meal they discussed how things were going at school for Remus and James, both of whom attended the local primary school along with Severus. Sirius was the only one of the four friends who was home-schooled. The two boys raced off to do homework that was due in the upcoming week while Charles, Emma and Orion talked.

"What do you plan to do about young Mr Snape?" Charles asked, and Orion sighed.

"I don't know Charles; I've already explained to Remus that if I do take guardianship of Severus, it won't mean that I'll abandon him."

"So you might end up with two sons again," Emma commented.

Orion looked at her and then shrugged. "Maybe. It depends on if Severus' situation deteriorates to the state where I take guardianship, and also if he wants to be adopted anyway. He may just want a guardian, not another father."

Charles shook his head. "I don't agree Orion, I think that if offered the chance, he'd like to call you his father, I saw you talking with him at the party, and he was delighted that you took him seriously."

Orion scowled. "He would have looked like that at anyone who treated him kindly. I should know, I was once in his position. If it weren't for my friends and their families, I would have become the next Dark Lord, I know it. And my first kills would have ended up

being my dear relatives," he growled.

Emma looked startled. "Orion, we didn't mean to upset you. All we're saying is that there is a high chance that you might end up adopting Severus, which would be good for both you and him."

Orion nodded. "I know. I just see so much of my own childhood situation in him, and I have to wonder if the future version of him hated me in part because he subconsciously recognized the same thing in reverse."

"Maybe. But we don't know that, the only thing we can do is go ahead and take each day as it comes," Charles said sensibly and Orion nodded in agreement. He then looked suspiciously at the stairs. "It's far too quiet, they should have been done by now" he murmured.

Changing into Leo he made his way upstairs, his paws making no noise on the carpet. Peering round the door of James' room he saw Remus and James lying on the bed talking, with their homework on the desk, completed. Leo gave a tiny purr, and then crept closer.

James was looking out the window and saying, "..yeah I wonder if we'll be Animagi when we get old enough to learn how to do it. I'd be a lion I think." Remus shook his head. "We don't choose what our form is though James, besides, a lion?"

"Yeah, a lion," James said and then his face lit up. "I've been practicing." He screwed his face up in concentration and let out a sound that sounded rather like a cat."

Remus chuckled. "I don't think that's quite what it sounds like James. I think it sounds more like.."

At that point Leo interrupted with a "ROOAAAR!" and the two boys just about hit the ceiling. They landed on the bed and stared at the huge cat in trepidation.

"Um, Remus, we don't have a pet lion as far as I know," James said nervously. Remus was staring at Leo and growling, Moony coming near the surface. Recognizing this, Leo changed back into Orion.

"Hey boys. Miss me?" he said with a grin.

Remus and James stared at him and then looked at each other. "GET HIM!" James yelled and launched himself at his uncle. Remus followed a couple of seconds later and when Charles came up to see what the noise was about he found Orion pinned to the floor, laughing as Remus and James sat on top of him, tickling him.

"OK guys, get off him," Charles said with a grin. James reluctantly got off of Orion and Remus rolled off him too. Orion regained his feet and pulled them to their feet as well.

"James, animagi don't choose their forms, the animagus form is the animal that fits your personality the best," Orion said once he'd regained his breath.

"Then how come you have two forms Dad, I thought that was impossible," Remus said. Orion smiled. "I have two forms because my lion form is connected to my family ancestry while my wolf form is my individual form Remus. Most people only have one though, you're right about that. Very few wizards can have more than one form."

Remus nodded, and then James said, "You just about scared the life out of us with that roar Uncle Orion."

Orion looked sheepish. "Sorry but that roar you tried was so cute, and then Remus gave me the perfect opportunity to try mine out."

James shrugged. "Did you know about your forms when you were young?" Orion shook his head. "Not till the summer between my fifth and sixth years at school. My godfather taught me how to transform

and he laughed so hard when I first tried to roar in my lion form."

"Why?"

"Because my first attempt sounded a lot like your earlier attempt James. Mind you, I learnt my wolf form first so when my godfather wouldn't stop laughing I transformed into Shadow and bit him."

Laughter echoed down the stairs as Charles, Orion, James and Remus came downstairs, Remus holding his homework. As he hadn't been at school over the full moon, James had saved the homework assignments for him and he'd now done them. After promises had been made to see each other at the sleepover, Remus and Orion left, returning to Marauder Manor. Orion stood by Remus' bedroom door that night, just watching him sleep, at least until Remus cracked one eye open.

"Night Dad" he murmured. Orion ruffled his hair and walked over to the door again.

As Remus fell asleep, the last thing he heard was Orion's quiet reply of "Goodnight son."

Chapter Eight: The Sleepover and Family Issues

Orion smiled as he and Remus stood by the Floo, welcoming Sirius, James and Severus through, along with their parents. Remus quickly dragged the other three boys off upstairs to choose their rooms while Orion assured their parents that their children would be perfectly safe with him over the weekend. The sleepover which had initially been planned for two weeks after the party at the Black's house had been delayed when Sirius and James had caught dragonpox. It wasn't dangerous for children, or for adults that had had it in childhood. For adults that hadn't had it in childhood however it could be very dangerous, this was why Orion had been ordered by Charles to keep well away until the danger had passed.

Soon after that, all the boys reappeared downstairs and there was a general chorus of "Behave" from the departing parents. Orion smirked, they might not know it, but he intended to encourage the four young Marauders to play plenty of pranks this weekend – and if the boys thought that he was just there as a target then that was their loss. Besides, he was quite looking forward to matching wits against the four of them.

"Now guys, I'll just go over the ground rules for the weekend and then we can start with the fun stuff OK," he said, seeing four pairs of eyes snap up to his instantly. Smiling, he sat in a chair and smirked when they flopped down onto the rest of the furniture without a care in the world.

"Remus already knows this but for the rest of you, my study is off limits, totally, unless I give you permission to go in it. Each of your rooms is off limits to the others unless you want them in there, and my bedroom is totally off limits. The only time I want you in my bedroom is if any of you need me for something during the night alright. Other than that it's private. The other room that is also off limits is my study, I don't want any of you in there unless I give permission. I also won't tolerate any insulting each other or any fights.

Insulting me is also not allowed. Any sort of behavior like that will earn the culprit or culprits a stay in their rooms alone, and out of the general fun for a while."

All the kids nodded solemnly. Orion grinned. "Right. I don't tolerate harmful pranks or malicious ones but other than that – this weekend, try your hardest to prank me and each other and don't be surprised if you get pranked back. Mealtimes are off limits to pranks, as is any time before breakfast or after eight o'clock at night."

"You, you're giving us permission to prank you?" Sirius asked, hardly believing his ears. Orion smirked. "Yes. And if you think I'm going to be a peaceful target, think again. I've wanted to try out some pranks myself for a while so it will be a prank war. You four against me."

James, Remus, Sirius and Severus stared at him and then at each other before grinning.

"See you later Uncle Orion," James called as they dashed up the stairs, no doubt to start plotting. Orion relaxed in his chair, he'd let them prank him one or two times without retaliation but after that, well, all bets were off.

Upstairs, the four had congregated in Remus' room. Severus was thinking about something that Orion had said downstairs and while Sirius and James were trying to decide what prank to go with first, he cornered Remus.

"What did Orion mean, when he said that you already knew the ground rules?" he asked. Remus looked at him.

"I, he adopted me a few weeks ago Severus. My aunt abandoned me while he was over at my house helping me with a problem, and she nominated him as her choice for guardian. He signed adoption papers for me that day."

Severus looked hurt. "Would you mind if I talked with him?" he asked stiffly. Remus shook his head. "Go ahead. Do you want me to come with you?"

Severus shook his head again and went back downstairs to talk to Orion. Coming into the lounge he spotted Orion still sitting in his chair and went up to him.

"Um, Orion, can I talk to you?" he asked. Orion put down the book he was reading, and pulled the sofa closer with his wand. "Of course Severus, what do you want to talk about?"

"Your adoption of Remus. Where does that leave me?"

Orion sighed. "Severus, Remus' adoption wasn't planned. I was over at his house, helping with an issue which I'm familiar with, and she left a note on the table stating that she'd gone to the Ministry to fill out forms that would give me custody of Remus. When we got to the Ministry we discovered that those were adoption forms. I have already had this conversation with Remus and I am going to tell you exactly what I told him."

Leaning forward, Orion caught Severus' eyes with his and said firmly, "If it becomes necessary for me to be your guardian, I will more than likely ask you if you want me to adopt you as well. Should you say yes, and you are under no obligation to do so, you would become my son, exactly the same as Remus has. You'd be brothers in a sense, and I wouldn't love either of you any less than the other. Remus is my son now because his aunt decided to abandon him without saying a word to either one of us. Your mother has taken the time to tell you what she's planned, and for you and I to get to know each other a bit. You will not be left alone if something happens to your mother Severus, I promise."

Severus leaned forward a bit, and Orion enfolded him in a hug. "Thank you Orion. It's just that, well, I was hoping that one day you'd

be my Dad, and to find out that someone else had already taken that place.." he trailed off as Orion chuckled.

"Oh Sev, I had three children before I came here and the fights over which one I loved more were horrendous at times. I have more than enough love for both you and Remus, and James too, as he's my nephew. You and Remus aren't in a competition for my affection, remember that."

Severus sat back and Orion let go of him. "Thanks. I'd better get back, Remus looked worried and I think James and Sirius are plotting some pretty wild stuff," he said with a smirk.

Orion smirked back. "Yes well, I'm sure I'll think up a suitable comeback," he said and laughed as Severus dashed back up the stairs.

As he entered Remus' room, Severus looked over at him and smiled slightly. Remus nodded back, relieved and the four settled down to discuss pranks. As young wizards they didn't yet have wands but that didn't mean that they couldn't play pranks. After about half an hour they got up and went downstairs. They avoided the study and the kitchen, not wanting to upset Noddy, and made their way outside.

"Does everyone know what to do?" James asked. Seeing nods from the rest he grinned. "OK. Operation Prank Uncle Orion is on." He ran to the french doors leading into the lounge and said, "Uncle Orion, would you mind coming outside?"

Orion looked up. Seeing the amusement in James' eyes and the watchfulness of his son and his other two houseguests he immediately thought that a prank was in the wind. Stretching, he got up, resolving to see what it was first, and then think up some retaliation. He, after all, could use magic where they couldn't.

"So, what do you four terrors want with me?" he enquired. Severus

and Remus tugged at his arms. "We want you to explain some stuff to us. Stuff about Hogwarts," they said.

Orion raised an eyebrow. "And why do you want me outside for this? Wouldn't inside be better?" He nearly laughed at the expressions on their faces. They obviously wanted him outside so he obliged them.

"Alright. What do you want to know?" he said, sitting down underneath one of the trees. With Severus and Remus occupying his attention, James and Sirius snuck indoors to the lounge.

"Right. Super strength magical glue, check. One favorite armchair, check. One super stuck Uncle coming up," James snickered as he and Sirius spread the glue all over the seat and back of the chair, as well as the armrests.

"Let's see him get out of this one," Sirius snorted as they went back outside and flopped down next to Remus.

"...the classes aren't that difficult in first year, but you do need to pay attention," Orion was saying. Sirius waited until he was finished before asking, "But what about the Houses. Aren't there specific Houses that some families go into?"

Orion looked at him. "Some families do seem to end up all in one House, Sirius but others don't. There was a set of twins in my year; one was in Gryffindor, the other Ravenclaw. My godfather's family was all in Slytherin but he ended up a Gryffindor. It depends on each person's personality and where they'd best fit. But, no matter which House you end up in, all of us have the traits of every House in us. You just go to the House with the most dominant trait. Take my friend for an example. She was the cleverest witch in our year, but she had more bravery than brains, which was rather scary when you consider how smart she was."

"Did you end up marrying her?" Severus asked.

Orion nodded. "Yes. But," he trailed off, and seemed to be looking into the distance. He pulled himself together and finished, "She was a wonderful witch and my best friend. I miss her, and don't think I'll ever stop missing her."

"Is that why you won't get married again?" James asked.

Orion gave him a sharp look. "Where did you hear that?" he asked.

James shrugged. "I overheard Mum and Dad talking. They said you loved your wife so much that you wouldn't ever marry again."

Orion shrugged. "I might. It depends on whether any witches are available that I could actually love."

"You didn't marry for political reasons?" Sirius asked. Orion shook his head.

"No. I married the witch that I loved, as my father did, neither of us believed in arranged marriages." This was actually true, the Potters were among the few pureblood families that didn't do arranged marriages, and were relaxed and welcoming regarding family members marrying Muggleborns and even Muggles.

Orion stood up. "Now, enough of this topic I think lets go inside and I'll see if I can identify where you've set up that prank."

Seeing four shocked looks he smirked. "Two of you grab me and haul me outside while two disappear inside? It practically screams "prank". Don't worry; I won't dispel it before it has a chance to take effect."

He allowed himself to be led inside and then ran a magical scan over the room. Although none of the four could use magic yet, they did have access to Diagon Alley and by extension, Zonko's Joke Shop

via their parents. His scan detected nothing though and he sank down into his chair. Only then did he realize the prank.

"Oh very good guys, you've managed to glue me to my chair. When does it wear off?" he chuckled.

Remus looked at his partners in crime and then said "Um, well, Dad, we sort of used, uh, the super strong kind."

Orion raised his eyebrows. "The one that doesn't come off until a thousand years have passed?" Remus nodded. Orion chuckled.

"Don't look so worried. It won't come off by itself true, but that doesn't mean that it can't be removed by magic. See." He stood up, using a silent spell to vanish the glue. Unfortunately, the glue was strong enough to make the spell vanish what it was stuck to, leaving Orion standing in the lounge in his t-shirt and jeans and no chair behind him. Looking around behind him and then down to see what he was wearing, Orion shrugged. "Oops" he said before choosing one of the other chairs.

"Good prank guys, but beware of payback" he said, throwing silent spells at all of them. They yelped as they found themselves stuck to the walls and all of them glared at him before struggling free and jumping on Orion.

"Ah, mercy," Orion yelped as he was tickled by four sets of hands. Transforming into Leo he shook them off him and leapt away. This prompted a chase through the house, which made Orion very glad that he'd locked up the valuables and put Unbreakable Charms on everything that wasn't attached to the walls. Finally the four Marauders cornered the lion and leapt on him, giggling.

Leo just rolled over on his side and yawned, letting the four boys poke and prod him, smiling in a feline manner when they exclaimed over the softness of his mane and the slight roughness of his fur.

Severus even picked up one of his paws and gently squeezed it, pushing out one of the claws. Leo retracted it after a few minutes, swished his tail so it hit Sirius gently on the head when he tried pulling it, and then got up, transforming back into Orion in an instant.

"Wow, Dad, can we do that too?" Remus asked.

Orion smiled. "Not yet. It takes years to learn the transformation, you have to go to Hogwarts and learn transfiguration first. Then you need to discover what your form is, and learn everything about it before you try to transform into it."

"Can we discover what our forms are now though, and then we can research when we get to Hogwarts," James tried. Orion shook his head.

"I'm afraid not James, the Ministry has fairly strict regulations about the Animagus transformation, if they learnt I was attempting to teach you how to do it now, then I'd be in trouble. Just wait until you're old enough and then I'll teach you."

"How old do we have to be?" Sirius grumbled, and Orion hid a smile.

"My father and his friends managed it in their fifth year at Hogwarts. I myself managed it in the summer before my sixth year. Why don't you go and think up more pranks, or play Quidditch or something like that while I attempt to recreate my chair."

The boys raced outside and grabbed their brooms. Sirius had brought his over, as had James, while Severus and Remus grabbed two from the broom cupboard in the front hall. Soon they were up in the air, playing a game of catch with the Quaffle. Orion gave up recreating his chair and went outside to watch, before growing bored with being on the ground. Calling his broom to him, he leapt on it and took off.

He drew level with the four Marauders and then turned so he was sitting sideways on the broom. "Anyone up for a game of tag?" he asked with a grin. Swinging his leg back over the broomstick he leaned forward, tagged James and took off.

James sat there for a minute before tagging Remus. "You're it!" he yelled and took off after Orion. Severus and Sirius looked at each other before racing away from Remus as well, who immediately took off in hot pursuit.

The game was fast and furious, with all of them ending up as "It" at least once. It ended when James slipped off his broom while turning.

"James!" came a panicked yell from Remus, Sirius and Severus. They watched helplessly as their friend fell towards the lake. A blur suddenly shot past them, and they watched in awe as Orion caught James a foot above the water and pulled up, holding him safely in his arms. As Orion landed, holding a shaking James securely on his broom, the other three landed on the ground and came running up to them. James was shocked when he felt that his uncle was shaking almost as much as he was.

"That was some catch Orion," Sirius said admiringly.

Orion nodded, wrapping an arm round James' shoulders, slowly calming down. "Yeah. I used to be Seeker on my Quidditch team. Got onto it in first year."

"I'm not small enough to be a Snitch though," James commented, his shivers dying down slowly as he registered that he was back on the ground again. Orion looked down at him and hugged him tightly, his eyes worried as he looked at the lake.

"No you're not. You're much more precious than a Snitch," he murmured, chuckling when James blushed slightly.

"Did you win every game you played in?" Severus asked. Orion shook his head. "No. It's almost impossible to win every game. I did almost swallow the snitch in my first game though."

"Well that would have been amusing," Remus commented.

Orion chuckled and ruffled his hair. "Yeah it was. Very funny – after I stopped choking." There were a few nervous chuckles from his audience.

"Well, it's about time for lunch, so do any of you have any objections to making it a picnic one out here?" Orion asked. Hearing no objections, Orion smiled and sat down.

"Noddy" he called. The house elf popped just in front of him and bowed. "Yes Master Potter what can Noddy be doing for you?"

Orion smiled. "Could you bring lunch out here Noddy, it's such a nice day we don't want to eat inside."

Noddy smiled and popped away, and soon there was a feast spread out in front of the hungry group all on blankets and looking absolutely delicious. Orion saw the hungry looks and smiled.

"Don't stand on ceremony, this is a picnic. Dig in," he invited, biting into a ham sandwich himself. Seeing him start to eat, the four boys also dug in and for a time there was no talking, just eating.

Once the food was gone Orion found himself the target of four penetrating stares. He raised his eyebrows. "OK you lot, why are you looking at me like that?" he asked.

The four Marauders, as Orion now thought of them, looked at each other before Severus replied, "We want to know what the future's like."

Orion sighed mentally. "I can't tell you. Mostly because it involves all of you and I don't think my story is appropriate for you at this age. I will tell you when you're seventeen. For now, just accept that please. I know you want to know but believe me, there are some things that are best left unknown, at least for now."

"Fine" Remus grumbled, "but you'd better tell us then Dad, or we'll find out another way."

"Oh? And how would you do that?" Orion asked.

"Divination of course" Sirius snorted. James nodded alongside him.

Orion smirked. "I'm sorry to disappoint you but Divination is a very imprecise branch of magic, very few people actually have the ability to see the future and what they see is usually very vague and hardly ever comes true."

James and Sirius looked crestfallen until James said, "Well without giving away names, can you tell us what you were like as a kid? Things like that?"

Orion leaned back against a tree. "Alright. I won't give any names, or dates, but I will tell you in general, things that I got up to at school."

James started off. "Did you go to Hogwarts and if so, did you like it?"

Orion smiled softly. "Yes I did, I was in Gryffindor, and I loved it for the most part. It was my home."

"I thought you said you lived with your aunt and uncle? Did you not consider their place home?" Severus asked, confused.

Orion sighed. "Severus, remember when I said that my uncle was much like your father?" Severus nodded. "Well, my aunt was jealous of my mother's ability to do magic, and hated her for it. She

transferred that hate to me when I was given to them after my parents' deaths. My uncle didn't like anything out of the ordinary and so treated me exactly like my aunt did, which was terribly."

"Did they, you know, hurt you?" Remus asked.

Orion smiled somewhat bitterly. "Not really. They left that up to my cousin. They neglected me basically, fed me only enough to survive, my bedroom until I was eleven was the cupboard under the stairs and they tried to squash the magic out of me. They even tried to prevent me getting my Hogwarts letters."

"Obviously they didn't succeed but how was it during school?" Remus asked.

Orion now smiled happily. "Great. I was surprised to find out that magic existed, but it was good all the same. I wasn't all that great a student, but I got decent marks."

"So, did you get in trouble a lot?" This came from Sirius.

Orion smirked. "A fair bit. Mostly from annoying my Potions Professor, but seeing that he hated my father, I couldn't do anything to please him anyway so I annoyed him all I could. I did respect him though, once he got past the fact that I wasn't a carbon copy of my dad. We got past all that in my seventh year though, when he and the student who up till then had been my school rival helped me when I was thrown into a particularly embarrassing situation. Other than that, I got in trouble because I helped other people out of sticky situations."

"What about your wife?" Severus asked.

Orion didn't answer for a time and then he said, "She was my best friend, my conscience, the one I could talk to about anything and she'd always listen. She was able to calm me down when I got upset about anything and she had courage in spades. She was smart

enough to be a Ravenclaw but her courage made her a Gryffindor. Then there was me who was cunning enough to be in Slytherin, but I wanted to be in the same House as my other friend, so I was put in Gryffindor."

"Can you tell us about your family?" Sirius asked before James and Remus elbowed him in the stomach. "Ouch, what was that for?" he complained. James and Remus merely nodded at Orion who had closed his eyes.

"Sorry Orion," Sirius said, "I didn't mean to hurt you."

Orion opened his eyes again and looked at Sirius for a minute before giving him a small smile. "It's alright Sirius. I will say this – I had twin sons and a daughter, you and James remind me of my sons and my daughter had your studious nature Remus. We could never keep her nose out of a book and we charmed everything to be Unbreakable, so no matter what the twins did, it wouldn't cause too much damage. That's all I'm going to say on them so don't ask again."

His small audience nodded and then flopped backwards on the grass. "We can't think of anything else Uncle Orion," James finally commented.

Orion just nodded. "That's fine. No more questions on the future then, it's best to leave it now until you're all seventeen and I can tell you the full story."

Nods greeted that statement. They lay there looking up at the cloud formations for a while, trying to guess what they most resembled. Orion won the competition for most correct guesses. His "prize" was giving all of the boys a ride round the garden as Leo, one at a time. When he'd finished giving Remus a ride, they begged him to stay as Leo, so he lay down under the tree and let them use him as a backrest.

Noddy discovered this amusing sight when he came out to call them all in for dinner. They had snoozed away the afternoon, and were surprised to find it was dinnertime already. Nevertheless Orion shoed them all upstairs to wash their hands, while he took advantage of the downstairs bathroom. When Remus led the others into the dining room, Orion was already seated at the head of the table. Remus took the seat to his left, while Severus and James had a silent argument over who was sitting at his right. Finally Orion rolled his eyes and pulled James into the seat as he was closest. Severus sat next to Remus and Sirius sat next to James.

They were just finishing dinner when there was a commotion in the lounge. Orion stood with a frown as the Floo chimed a warning, telling him that an unknown wizard had entered the house.

Noddy appeared at the door his eyes wide and frightened. He just had time to say "Master Potter sir, young master Snape's father is.." before he was thrown against the wall as Tobias Snape strode into the dining room.

Severus gasped, his body going rigid, his eyes widening in fear. James, Sirius and Remus looked between him and the fuming wizard standing in front of them and then got up, forming a defensive wall between Tobias and Severus.

Orion silently applauded their courage and loyalty as he stood between Tobias and all of them. Locking eyes with his unwelcome guest he said, "What gives you the right to barge into my home unannounced like this?"

Tobias sneered at him, to which Orion raised an eyebrow, not impressed or intimidated in the slightest. He'd seen worse from the adult version of Severus after all. "I came for my son, his mother let him come here when she had no right to do so!" Tobias snarled. Severus whimpered slightly, before immediately squashing any further sound. Orion's eyes narrowed, knowing by that one sound

that Severus was terrified.

"I wasn't aware that Eileen had to ask your permission before granting Severus permission to attend a sleepover at one of his friends' houses. Nor am I about to stand aside and watch you take him by force. He's terrified of you, and from what I'm seeing, he has good reason to be. His mother said he could be here and as far as I'm concerned, that's it."

Orion walked right up to Tobias and snarled quietly, "Now leave my house and don't return. Ever."

Tobias had no choice but to leave, he sensed that Orion could take him apart in a heartbeat if he chose to, and he wasn't about to pick a fight in his opponent's home territory as it were. He snarled and backed away. Before he left though, he locked eyes with his son and growled, "I'll deal with you later!"

When he'd gone, Severus collapsed in his chair, shaking. James, Sirius and Remus surrounded him, wanting to offer comfort but not sure how. They were scared too, they'd all at some point annoyed their parents but their parents had never scared them like Severus' father had.

They moved out of the way as Orion knelt down beside Severus and gently drew him into a hug. Severus clung to Orion like a drowning person would cling to a piece of driftwood and buried his head into the older wizard's shoulder.

"Dad?" Remus asked, worried. Orion looked up to meet three worried gazes. Shifting his grip slightly, he stood, lifting Severus easily. "Come on guys, let's go into the lounge. I think we need to recover a bit from that."

Orion sat down on the couch, with Severus still cuddled up beside him. Remus, James and Sirius found spots surrounding Orion so

they were all touching him in some way. Finally James broke the silence that had descended on the room.

"Why was he so mad, and why did he come here in the first place?" he said, his voice shaking slightly. Orion sighed, but before he could answer, Severus did. He lifted his head out of Orion's shoulder and turned so he was facing his friends.

"My father is a control freak. He wants to control my mother and me. He hates me because he thinks I'm a disappointment, and he hates Mum because she defends me from him."

"So, because he didn't say you could come, means that you'll be in trouble when you get home?" Remus questioned.

Severus shuddered, and then nodded silently. "He'll probably curse me again, or Mum. I hate him!" he finished fiercely.

Orion enfolded him in a hug once more as the fight seemed to leave him, tucking him in under his chin and just holding him. Sirius looked at them and then tucked his legs up underneath himself. "And I thought my home life was bad," he quipped. James reached out hesitantly, touching Severus' shoulder. There was no movement for a moment and then Severus grasped his hand. Sirius put his hand on top of theirs and then Remus put his on top.

"Is there anything you can do Uncle Orion?" James asked.

Orion looked at him. "To help Severus?" he enquired. James nodded. Orion looked at the ceiling. "At the moment, James, Tobias is Severus' father. No matter what his mother and I have arranged, until Tobias either dies or does something which necessitates Sev's removal from the house, I cannot legally interfere."

"But you made him go away before," Remus said.

Orion nodded. "I did. That was because what I said was true – Sev's mother did indeed give him permission to be here and if Tobias wants him removed, then it needs to be discussed between them."

Severus sat up and shifted so he was sitting more comfortably on the couch. "Can I stay here Orion? Please? I don't want to go back."

Orion's heart ached, he wanted Severus to stay with him and Remus too, he wanted nothing more than to keep him safe, but he knew that he couldn't, at least for the moment. "I wish I could say yes Severus, but at the moment I can't. I would be charged with kidnapping, or possibly something worse. I can however, offer you the freedom to stay here whenever you wish, and your mother as well. I'm not happy about letting your father anywhere near you but he is your father."

Severus shook his head. "He might be my bio, bio – what's that word that means that people are related by blood?"

Orion smiled. "Biological," he said.

Severus nodded. "Yes. He might be my biological father but I want you. I want you to be my father, I don't care if it's by adoption, I want to stay here. I know I'm safe with you; I don't know how I know that, I just do."

Orion sighed. "I know Severus. I know." He said nothing more and Severus just cuddled up to him, determined to absorb all the caring he could before he had to leave and go back home. He knew his mother loved him, and he loved her, but there was only so much she could do to defend him from his father if he was determined to hurt them.

Later that evening, Severus knocked at Remus' door. Remus opened it and stepped aside, letting him in. They settled down on the bed and Remus looked at his friend, who he wanted as a brother.

"I envy you, you know that," Severus finally said, looking up at the night sky. Remus stayed silent. "You have a father that loves you. I know that Orion would adopt me in a heartbeat but I have to leave and go back home while you get to stay here."

"It's not Dad's fault!" Remus said, stung at the implied criticism of his father. Severus shrugged. "I know. But I can't help feeling envious. I'm trying not to, but I want to be part of your family so much."

A cough at the door alerted them to Orion's presence. Both boys looked up, worried that they'd done something wrong. Orion sat on the edge of the bed and gently rubbed Severus' shoulder.

"I know how you feel Severus. When I was stuck with my aunt and uncle, I would see my friends go off and spend holidays with their families, all happy and cheerful. I knew that it wasn't all happy, they had arguments and stuff just like anyone else but they were always there for each other. My best friend's family unofficially adopted me as another son but they couldn't make that official. I still had to spend most of my summers with my family, which I hated. When I learnt about Azkaban in my third year, I started calling my relative's home a mixture of their name and Azkaban."

There was a muffled chuckle from Severus and Orion gave a slight smile. "When my godfather was finally able to take care of me like he should have done, I was delighted. It was something of a shock the first time he scolded me for something though – I'd forgotten that he'd actually be a parent, and not a mixture of parent and older brother like he had been before. He wasn't all that strict but I'd been so independent that it was hard learning that I could rely on him for things like clothes and food and other basic necessities."

Severus raised his head to look Orion in the eyes. "If something happens to Mum you will adopt me right?"

Orion gave him a serious look and said, "Do you want me to? It

would mean that I would, for all intents and purposes, be your father, and Remus would be your brother. Can you handle that?"

Severus nodded enthusiastically. "Yes."

Remus coughed to gain their attention. "Um, Severus, before you say yes, there's something you need to know about me first. That little problem that Dad was helping me with when my aunt abandoned me involves the full moon. I'm a werewolf."

Remus sat and waited for his friend to recoil in disgust and fear. Instead, Severus grinned. "Really? Cool. What's it like?"

"You don't dislike me now?" Remus asked, hardly daring to believe his ears.

Orion smirked and gently punched Remus' shoulder. "What did I tell you pup? Your friends will not turn on you just because of this."

He turned back to Severus. "If you're alright with Remus' furry little problem then I will be glad to adopt you. The only thing you need to decide is whether you're going to change your name or not. Whatever you decide will be fine with me; I want you to be happy."

Severus smiled, a genuine happy smile and Orion grinned back. "I'll think on it – Dad," Severus said, trying out the title for size. He was rewarded with a group hug as Orion hugged both him and Remus at once.

"This won't be official yet you realize but I'll always be here if you need me," Orion said as he rose from the bed. Severus got off Remus' bed with him and went back to his own room. As he drifted off to sleep he was mentally designing his room and also thinking about how he would change his name.

Orion too, was thinking as he went to sleep – about how best to gain

custody of Severus, hopefully without bloodshed. Unfortunately for both of them, fate had other plans.

Chapter Nine: Research, Meetings and Memories

At the end of the sleepover the three visiting Marauders had gone home, although Severus had gone with marked reluctance. Remus had whispered, "Good luck," to him as he'd entered the Floo, while Orion had hugged him again. When their guests had gone Remus sat on the couch, reading a book that Orion had lent him from his study.

"Hey Dad, this book mentions something about Horcruxes. What are they?" Remus asked. Orion looked up, startled. He'd thought the book only contained general information on magic, not anything like Horcruxes.

"Give it here Remus, I want to have a look at it," he said, holding out his hand. Remus gave up the book and sat looking at the cover while Orion scanned it, frowning more and more. Finally he got up and put the book back in the study.

"Sorry Remus, I thought that book had only information on magic in general. As for your question, Horcruxes are the darkest of dark magic and aren't really suitable for you to be learning about."

"Sorry Dad," Remus said, looking rather upset.

Seeing this, Orion smiled reassuringly at him. "It's OK Remus, it's my fault for not looking more closely at that book. However, if you're interested in research, would you like to help me?"

Remus looked up at his father, his eyes shining. "Yes. What can I do, when do I start..."

Orion chuckled. "Hold on there; don't go rushing off just yet. I need to find six certain objects. These have been lost for a long time, so don't go thinking that we'll find them all in the next week OK. I'm expecting this to last for years so don't get upset if we don't find them."

Remus nodded. "Yes Dad. Still, where should we start looking?"

Orion chuckled again and disappeared into the study for a minute, coming out with lots of parchment and books. "We start here. Researching the history of an object can give clues to its current whereabouts." He bit his lip, containing a smile as his son's face fell noticeably at the mountain of paper in front of them.

Remus sighed before looking at Orion in determination. "Let's get started then" he said before diving in and pulling out a scroll. "Ravenclaw's dia, dia-what?" he squinted, trying to decipher the odd word.

"Diadem," Orion supplied, pulling out another scroll. "It's a type of tiara Remus, something that Rowena Ravenclaw would have worn on her head."

"What other objects are you looking for?" Remus asked. Orion passed a list to him.

"Here. But Remus, this has to be kept secret, just like my work. My team is also researching all of this so it's not just the two of us. You can't tell anyone what we're looking for."

Remus nodded solemnly and returned to reading the list. "OK, Ravenclaw's diadem, Salazar Slytherin's locket, Helga Hufflepuff's cup, a ring, and a diary."

Orion smiled as Remus frowned. "I'm seeing a pattern Dad. Ravenclaw, Slytherin and Hufflepuff were all Hogwarts Founders weren't they?" Orion nodded and then Remus asked, "So why isn't there something from Gryffindor on here?"

"Because most of Gryffindor's heirlooms have been lost to time. Only his sword remains and that is safely locked up in Hogwarts."

Remus nodded and returned his attention to the parchment in front of him. The lounge was silent except for the rustling of parchment and the occasional scratching of a quill as Orion wrote out notes on a new piece of parchment. They looked up as Orion's owl, Archimedes, a tawny owl that Orion had purchased when he'd been furnishing his house, landed on the table.

"Hey boy, what have you got there?" Orion said, untying the note that was attached to the owl's leg. While he read the note, Remus fed Archimedes a few owl treats.

"Not too many Remus, he'll get fat," Orion joked, grinning as Archimedes hooted indignantly at him. Remus laughed as the owl took off, raking through Orion's hair with his talons on his way to his perch.

"What's in the note Dad?" Remus asked.

Orion folded it up and tucked it in his pocket before sitting down again. "A note from Albus Dumbledore, replying to my request for a meeting at Hogwarts. I've got an appointment with him later on today to discuss various things with him."

"Including me?" Remus asked. Orion looked at him for a minute before nodding. "Yes. There is no reason that you shouldn't be allowed to attend Hogwarts, if certain precautions are put in place."

"Such as?"

"Such as making sure that either I'm with you at the full moons or that if I can't be there for some reason, that Moony is safely secured somewhere so there is no chance of him biting anyone."

Remus looked rather worried. "What happens if Moony does bite someone?"

Orion gave him a serious look. "If found guilty you would be executed. I wouldn't be able to do anything to stop it. It's the law, and while I don't like it, I wouldn't be able to help you."

Remus looked down at the table, not seeing it as he struggled with this new information. "You won't let that happen right?" he asked, seeking reassurance.

Orion smiled. "I will do everything in my power to prevent that Remus, but if the proper precautions are taken then there shouldn't be any problems. Tell you what, why don't you come with me to the meeting. You won't be able to stay for all of it but you will be able to stay for that bit."

Remus nodded and hugged Orion briefly. His stomach rumbled at that point and he blushed slightly. "I think my stomach needs food" he said.

Orion chuckled and then smirked as his own stomach rumbled. "Mine just answered yours, so let's go feed them," he said, getting up. More than happy to abandon the research, Remus rose eagerly.

"Can we do something other than research after lunch Dad?" he asked.

Orion smiled. "Bored already?" he asked.

Remus blushed. "I thought it would be exciting, but it's not really. How do you stand it?"

Now Orion chuckled. "It's not the most exciting part of my job, true, but it's an important part. See, once the boring stuff is out of the way, you can do the fun stuff. I shouldn't have asked you to help, you don't have to."

Now Remus was a bit hurt. "I did want to help Dad" he complained.

Orion ruffled his hair fondly. "I know, but I also know that eight-year-olds aren't really meant to do boring research like the stuff I'm doing. You're supposed to have fun, and give me lots of grey hairs. You can help me when you're older."

Remus pouted. "Isn't there anything I can do to help you though? Even if it's not research?" Orion smiled, Remus truly wanted to help, but at the moment he couldn't.

"I'm afraid not Remus, research is what my job entails at the moment. Once I've found some clue as to the whereabouts of those objects, then you might be able to help. It probably won't be until you're older though."

Remus scowled briefly but acquiesced. "Sorry that I'm not more help Dad" he murmured.

Orion just put an arm round his shoulders. "You were Remus. What you did today, it might not have seemed like much but it did help, OK? Don't worry about it."

Remus' mood didn't lighten until halfway through lunch when Orion casually mentioned that Severus would be visiting again in a week's time, and that James had invited him and Sirius over to the Potter's house for the coming weekend. This cheered him right up and after lunch he ran to the Floo and spent an hour talking to James about it, and discussing other things that were important to them, mainly Quidditch.

Mid-afternoon, Orion and Remus found themselves walking up the path to Hogwarts front doors. Just as they reached the massive doors, they swung open, revealing Minerva McGonagall. Orion kept himself under tight control, not wanting to give away his future relationship with the witch to Remus.

"Mr Potter and you've brought a friend as well," Minerva said with a small smile, holding out her hand. Orion shook it firmly. "Professor McGonagall. May I introduce my son, Remus. He wished to see Hogwarts while I'm meeting with the Headmaster and yourself."

Minerva nodded. "Of course. Remus it's good to meet you." She smiled at him and Remus smiled back nervously. "It's good to meet you too Professor," he replied quietly. The two Potters followed Minerva through Hogwarts, heading for Dumbledore's office. Remus was attempting to take in everything at once, his eyes wide as he looked round his future school.

"How old are you Remus?" Minerva asked. Remus blinked before replying "Eight Professor. I can't wait to come here. Dad says it's a really good school."

Minerva smiled. "He's right. It is a fine school with a long and proud history. I'm sure you'll be a good student."

Remus shrugged. "I don't like research all that much though. How am I supposed to do schoolwork?"

He was surprised when both Minerva and his father laughed. "Remus, the work I'm doing now isn't like schoolwork. With schoolwork, the answers are in your textbooks and the library, all you have to do is find the relevant books. My work is more uncertain – I have to look practically everywhere I can think of. Don't compare the work you'll be doing here with what I'm doing, it's not the same" Orion explained.

Minerva nodded. "Your father's right Remus. The work here isn't all that difficult, at least not in the lower years. You'll do fine."

Remus stopped and stared at the portraits for a minute. Sensing that he needed a moment to think, Orion and Minerva stopped as well.

"What House do you think I'll be in?" Remus asked, walking forward again. Orion and Minerva exchanged a glance.

"You never really know until you're Sorted Remus, however I think it could either be Gryffindor or Ravenclaw. Don't worry about it. I don't mind what House you end up in, just that you do your best. Alright?" Orion said, trying to alleviate Remus' worries. He was rewarded with a hug from his son and then heard a slight gasp from him as the trio reached the stone gargoyle that guarded Dumbledore's office.

"Lemon Drops," Professor McGonagall said and the gargoyle moved aside, exposing the moving staircase up to Dumbledore's office. Orion and McGonagall stepped on it immediately. Remus hesitated a bit and then followed.

"Ah Minerva come in," Dumbledore said genially, his eyes twinkling. He twinkled even more when he spotted Orion and Remus. "Mr Potter, I'm glad you could come. And your son is it?"

Orion nodded and introduced Remus once more. Remus just smiled at him and murmured a quiet hello before he retreated into silence, studying the office. Just then there was a quiet trill and Fawkes flew over, landing on Orion's shoulder briefly before hopping into Remus' lap and singing a soothing song to the young boy.

"Uh," Remus said, looking at the red and gold bird in shock. He felt soothed and calm in the bird's presence but didn't know what to do. Orion laid a hand on his shoulder. "He's a phoenix Remus. He won't hurt you, he's being friendly."

Dumbledore spoke up, having observed the interaction in front of him with pleasure. "Yes he is. Fawkes only does this with people he likes Remus. Phoenixes are fascinating creatures, firmly attached to the Light, they can carry very heavy loads, and their tears have healing powers. He can sense that you and your father are good people, and that's why he flew over, to say hello."

"Why not Professor McGonagall then?" Remus asked.

Minerva smiled. "He already knows me Remus, and he sensed that you were nervous so he decided to help you. Just let him stay there, he'll go when he wants."

Remus relaxed slowly and gently stroked the phoenix's red and gold feathers. Orion leaned over and did the same, before fixing his attention on Dumbledore and McGonagall. They fixed their gazes on him in return and a silent staring match ensued, which was broken when Fawkes decided to hop onto Orion's lap for a bit more petting. The quiet trills of contentment from the large bird helped break up the moment and all three adults relaxed.

"Well, Mr Potter, I must say that it's a pleasure to be meeting you at last" Dumbledore started. Orion looked at him for a moment, and Remus frowned. Moony was telling him that his father wasn't happy being near the Headmaster, although he was doing a good job of hiding it. Finally Orion replied, "It's a pleasure to meet you too Headmaster. Please, call me Orion."

Dumbledore and McGonagall both nodded. "Very well, Orion it is. Now, we wanted to meet with you for a couple of reasons. First is the matter of your son, Remus, and the second is the fact that you yourself requested this meeting which piqued our interest. Which should we start with?" Minerva enquired.

Orion now smiled fully, not wanting his inner turmoil to show in front of his son. "Let's start with Remus, and after that perhaps he could take a tour of the castle while we discuss the other matter I wanted to speak with you about." His audience nodded and then Dumbledore looked at Remus.

"Why do you wish to discuss your son with us Orion – he would be getting a letter anyway when he turns eleven," he said. He was

intrigued at the look exchanged between father and son at that question – Remus seemed to be resigning himself to something while Orion looked to be silently encouraging him.

"I'm a werewolf sir. I'm well aware of society's prejudices against my kind, I thought that maybe you wouldn't want a Dark Creature here," Remus finally replied. Dumbledore looked surprised at the resigned tone of voice Remus used while Orion was looking a bit annoyed.

"Remus, you're about as Dark as fresh snow. It is society that needs to change, not you, we've talked about this," Orion said, his tone conveying exasperation with an old argument. Remus looked at him and then looked away again.

Dumbledore intervened at this point, and said "Well, if the proper precautions are taken there's no reason for you not to attend Hogwarts Remus. We can easily arrange somewhere safe for you to transform on the full moons. Poppy Pomfrey, our nurse will have to know but she'll keep your secret too."

Remus looked shocked but Orion merely looked satisfied. "Thank you Headmaster," Orion said before turning his attention to Remus. "See, I told you. No reason to be worried at all." Turning back to Dumbledore he said, "I can help him with the transformations as I'm an Animagus, but having somewhere to transform if I'm not available for some reason would be good."

"As an Animagus, would you be letting him roam the forest with you?" Minerva asked.

Orion looked thoughtful. "Perhaps. We'd stick to the forest, and I wouldn't let him near any people. His wolf form is still young, and therefore does need to run around."

"What is your form may I ask?" Minerva enquired. Orion grinned and transformed into Shadow. Minerva smiled in delight. "A fine form

Orion. And one most suited to control a werewolf. I don't think we're going to have any problems."

Orion transformed back and grinned at his future Head of House. "No we shouldn't. May Remus go on that tour now, while we discuss the other topic?"

Minerva nodded. "Yes. If you don't wish me to be here then I can take him myself. I have nothing else that is particularly important that needs doing so I'd be pleased to show him round."

Orion smiled. "Thank you Professor, that's very kind of you." He turned to Remus and gave him a brief hug. "Go with Professor McGonagall now, you'll have lots to tell me when you get back." He watched as Remus and Minerva headed out the door and then turned his attention back to Dumbledore.

"You're a good father" the elder wizard remarked, taking a lemon drop and offering one to Orion, which he politely declined.

Orion shrugged. "I try to be. He's a good kid, but he does tend to listen rather too much to our society's views of what he is rather than follow his own instincts. It's something I'm attempting to change, and we're making slow but steady progress I think."

Dumbledore smiled. "Indeed you are. Well Orion, how may I help you?" Orion looked at him evenly and then said, "You can tell me everything you know about Tom Marvolo Riddle and any Horcruxes he may have created."

Dumbledore almost choked on one of his lemon drops and when he'd recovered from that, he stared at Orion in shock. "How do you know of Tom Riddle and Horcruxes?" he finally said, eyeing Orion suspiciously. Orion held out his hands.

"Please Headmaster; you have no reason to fear me. If you have

been listening to the Ministry lately you would know of my rather unusual arrival here, is that true?"

Dumbledore nodded and gestured for him to continue. "Very well then, then I should tell you that I have been sent back here, by your own phoenix in fact, to destroy Tom Riddle's or rather, Voldemort's, Horcruxes."

"That is an admirable goal Mr Potter but why you?" Dumbledore asked.

Orion looked at him coolly. "You do not need to know that at this time, Headmaster, simply know that I was given this mission and I intend to complete it."

Dumbledore looked cautious. "Why do you not trust me to know the rest of this story?" he asked.

Orion scowled. "Your future self did not endear himself to me very much. He did several things to me when I was younger which I only discovered in my seventh year at Hogwarts. The nature of his actions caused our relationship to become very strained. I am doing my best to not let his actions influence my opinion of you at the moment, but if you continue to try and use Legilemency against me like you did at the beginning of this meeting then it will become much more difficult."

Dumbledore looked shocked and then he nodded sadly. "I know that I don't know the full situation but for what it's worth, I apologise for my future self's actions," he said softly. Orion just nodded and said nothing in response. Dumbledore sighed and considered the information his guest had given him before coming up with a new line of questioning.

"Why did you come to me though? From what I hear, you and your team of Unspeakables are doing well in researching them yourself," Dumbledore said in an effort to get Orion to open up.

Orion was perturbed at Dumbledore's knowledge of his job but nodded anyway. "We are yes, however as much as I know from the future, what I don't know is exactly when he created them. I know that Voldemort will be a problem in the nineteen-seventies. He will start a war, based on blood, but I don't know whether he'd created all his Horcruxes before then or whether he would continue to make them."

"He can only make a maximum of six if my research is correct," Dumbledore offered. Orion smirked. "Yes. As far as I know, he has definitely already made one. I need to track down the others as soon as they are made, or if they're already made I need to know their whereabouts so I can destroy them."

"Won't Tom know when you destroy one?"

"No. He doesn't feel it, the soul pieces in the Horcruxes aren't connected to his body anymore, so he cannot feel their destruction."

Dumbledore nodded and returned to the Horcruxes. The discussion about them and where Voldemort could have hidden them lasted until dinner which Dumbledore insisted Orion and Remus share with the staff. The students had gone home for the Easter break so only the staff would be present.

Remus had enjoyed the tour of Hogwarts very much and Professor McGonagall had taken a liking to him which Orion thought was all well and good for the moment. He wondered if she would still like him once the Marauders hit Hogwarts.

He looked up the staff table, seeing unfamiliar faces in some seats and familiar faces in others. He smiled as he saw Flitwick, and Poppy, and then Hagrid. He was less enthusiastic when he recognized Horace Slughorn, his Potions Professor for his sixth year and apparently the Potions Professor now. Orion wondered idly whether

Severus would be Slughorn's direct replacement or whether there would be another teacher in between.

He felt an intent gaze settle on him and looked up from his almost finished dinner. The DADA Professor, whose name Orion didn't know was staring at Remus with dislike. Remus, who had finished his meal, was looking at the professor in confusion.

"Headmaster, why is there a young werewolf at the table?" the man said loudly. Remus stiffened and turned to look up at his father, who he noticed was glaring at the Professor.

"He is here, Professor, because he is my son and a future student at this school. I came here for a meeting with the Headmaster, and he invited us to stay for dinner," Orion replied in an icy tone before Dumbledore could get a word in.

The DADA Professor smirked at the two of them. "A future student you say sir. Well, perhaps I can use him in demonstrations; it's not every day that you get to have a werewolf in your class. There are many curses I can use.."

He abruptly stopped talking as Orion had lifted him, wandlessly, from his chair, and thrown him back against the wall. The rest of the Professors were shocked, and stood, attempting to calm the situation down.

"Put him down Orion, we do need him you know," Dumbledore tried.

Orion shook his head. "I won't be sending Remus here if this is the type of treatment that he can expect from his teachers. How did this jerk know anyway?"

"Because I've made a study of the beasts, I saw his mark," the DADA Professor wheezed out from around the vice-like magical grip that Orion had on his throat. Orion looked at Remus with a puzzled frown

until he noticed that Remus' shirt had ridden up on his arm, exposing the crescent-shaped scar which indicated a werewolf bite.

"Remus is not a beast you arrogant, prejudiced git!" Orion snarled. He let the Professor go abruptly and the man fell to the floor. He got up slowly, seeing nothing but contempt and anger in the eyes of his fellow Professors. His eyes sought out Remus, only to find Orion standing in front of him, eyes blazing, promising a world of pain if he tried anything.

Dumbledore glared at him and then said in a cold tone "Professor Garber, wait in my office. We obviously need to discuss a few things." Turning to Orion he said, "I'm very sorry that this happened Mr Potter, you can be assured that none of the rest of my staff share his views."

Orion looked round and saw the rest of the staff glaring at the DADA professor. Mollified a bit he placed an arm round Remus' shoulders. "Thank you Headmaster. I would apologise for slamming your Professor against the wall, however I do not take it well when someone insults or belittles my son based on what he is. As far as I'm concerned, Remus is a young wizard who happens to get a little furry once a month."

"You're right," Flitwick squeaked. He walked over to Remus, who looked down at him. "You have nothing to be ashamed of Mr Potter, and just because one person is a prejudiced, narrow minded idiot, it doesn't mean everyone is. I can understand wanting to keep it a secret and it would be wise to hide it from the general student body, but just know that we, meaning the staff, don't hold it against you."

Remus nodded, trying and failing to hide the sudden tears in his eyes. "Thank you" he finally managed to whisper. The staff all nodded and Professor McGonagall walked over and crouched in front of him. She looked up at Orion and he gave her a small nod. Having got permission she drew Remus into a hug.

Orion wasn't as surprised as the rest of the staff were at McGonagall's kindness towards Remus. He wrapped his arms round himself as he remembered the day he'd discovered this softer side of his Professor for himself.

Flashback:

Harry was in the Room of Requirement, huddled against one of the walls as he turned a ring over in his hand. He'd intended to propose to Ginny that day, only to find that she was interested in his money and fame, not him. He'd walked to the Room of Requirement where he could be on his own, and think. Hot tears of anger and disgust coursed down his face as he thought to himself that he'd been stupid to even think that he could find a witch who loved him for himself and not for his fame.

He was pulled out of his self-loathing when an arm settled round his shoulders. He looked up to find Professor McGonagall sitting next to him. Not caring that she was his Head of House, Harry leaned his head on her shoulder and let more tears flow until he was exhausted. Once he'd cried himself out, he told her the story and she ended up giving him some useful advice as well as providing a calming influence until he'd pulled himself together. She had also not removed her arm from where it was until he stood up to leave.

End flashback

Orion came back to himself as he saw Remus move back towards him and he laid a hand on his shoulder. "Alright?" he asked quietly. Remus nodded and Orion gave Professor McGonagall a smile, receiving one in return.

"Let's go home," Orion murmured, exerting gentle pressure on Remus' shoulder to steer him towards the door. Remus waved to the staff, who waved back. The two Potters walked down the drive and then Apparated back home, landing in the living room.

"Are you really OK Remus, or was that just what you were willing to say in public?" Orion questioned.

Remus glared at him. "I'm hurt by that Professor's comments Dad but really, I'm fine now. OK?"

Orion nodded. "OK Remus. I was just making sure; you know I don't like seeing you hurt."

Remus nodded, he knew how protective his Dad was of him, and he wrapped his small arms round his father. "I'm OK Dad. Are you though? You looked like you were remembering something when Professor McGonagall was hugging me."

Orion smiled and sat down on the couch, Remus snuggling into his side. "I was. Professor McGonagall helped me during a particularly difficult time in my life, on several occasions in fact, and in doing so became something of a surrogate mother. It wasn't visible in public of course, but in private, well, it was nice."

Remus nodded, shivering a bit. Seeing this, Orion flicked his finger at the fireplace, where flames erupted not a second later. Soon the room was filled with warmth and Remus fell asleep. Orion smiled, not wanting to wake him, and just hugged him, closing his eyes. Two minutes later, he was also asleep.

When Noddy came in several hours later, he rolled his eyes and conjured a blanket, tucking it round his master and Remus, before cleaning the rest of the room. Neither Remus, nor Orion heard the soft Floo chime and Charles Potter chuckled when he saw the two of them curled up on the couch. Quietly, he pulled a camera through the Floo and took a picture, before withdrawing from the fire as quietly as he'd entered. Remus and Orion slept on, oblivious to the outside world until the next morning.

Chapter Ten: A New Family and Meeting Friends

Orion was woken up a week after the visit to Hogwarts by Noddy who was looking rather distressed. "What is it Noddy?" Orion yawned.

Noddy twisted his ears, before letting go of them and replied, "It is Master Remus sir, he be bouncing round the house and I can't get him to calm down sir."

Orion got up, grabbing his dressing gown from the hook on his bedroom door and stepped out into the hall, and went to stand at the top of the stairs, looking down them, trying to see if Remus was in view. He turned round when he heard a noise from up the hall, and saw Remus come dashing towards him at high speed.

Remus tried to stop, he really did, but just after he yelled out "DAD, I'M GOING TO JAMES' TODAY!," he tripped on the rug lining the hall and fell into his father. Orion, caught off balance, stumbled backwards and both of them tumbled down the stairs, landing in a painful tangle of limbs.

"Ouch," Orion muttered as he heard a quiet whimper from Remus. Righting himself, Orion noticed that his son was holding his ankle, which looked to be either fractured or outright broken. He drew his wand and cast a numbing charm on the affected body part before carefully checking Remus for any other injuries. Finding nothing more except bruises and knowing that he himself only had bruises, he stood up, picking Remus up from the floor as he did so.

"Come on Remy, looks like you'll be a little late to meet James today," he said as he Flooed to Hogwarts. Although he could go to St Mungo's he thought that Poppy Pomfrey might like some early experience with treating Remus.

"Mr Potter, this is a surprise. What's the problem," Poppy asked as Orion came through the fireplace in the infirmary, still holding Remus.

Orion gently put Remus down on one of the beds and stood back. "My son is in need of your professional services Madam Pomfrey. Has the Headmaster told you of his situation?"

Madam Pomfrey nodded absently as she examined Remus, finding the problem immediately. "It's not a problem for me at all and please call me Poppy," she replied, putting her wand on the bedside table for a minute and smiling at her young patient.

"Well Remus, a broken ankle. How did it happen?"

Remus blushed and replied, "I tripped on the upstairs hall rug and fell into Dad, and we both ended up falling down the stairs."

Poppy had to work hard to keep a straight face. "I see. Well, I'll just fix you up and then you can go do whatever it is you were going to do today. Just try not to fall down any more stairs, although I'm surprised it's not your father I'm treating."

Orion shrugged when both Poppy and Remus looked at him – Poppy with amusement and Remus in worry. The thought that he could have injured his father hadn't crossed his mind until then.

"I'm a bit difficult to kill – and I've had worse injuries. Falling down the stairs isn't going to do me a lot of harm," he said off handedly, turning the experience into a joke in order to help Remus. Even after several months with him, Remus was still worried that Orion might decide to abandon him although the display in the Hogwarts Great Hall a week earlier had put paid to most of the abandonment fear. He checked Remus' reaction to this out of the corner of his eye and saw a small smile on Remus' face. Grinning, he decided to elaborate on his statement.

"My Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher in second year was a real fraud and when I broke my arm in a Quidditch game he vanished the

bones instead of healing them. I had to drink Skele-Grow in order to get my arm back," he said. Remus looked at him as if he thought Orion was joking and when Orion shook his head, indicating that he wasn't, Remus looked a bit better.

"At least none of my bones disappeared," he said, testing his newly healed ankle carefully as he stood up. Finding it properly healed, he grinned at Orion. "Come on Dad, I'm sure James is wondering where I am," he said, heading for the door.

Orion chuckled and followed Remus to the fireplace, turning to wave at Poppy as they left. Poppy just shook her head in amusement and returned to stocking the infirmary for the next school year.

Remus and Orion tumbled out of the Floo in Potter Manor, but where Remus just fell out of the fire in a heap, Orion turned his fall into a roll and came up on his feet. He turned to help Remus up, but found that James had pulled Remus to his feet already.

"That was cool Uncle Orion," James said admiringly as Orion dusted his clothes free of ash. "Why did you do that though?"

Orion shrugged. "I've never been particularly good with the Floo so rather than falling on my face every time I use it I chose to turn the fall into a roll so I end up on my feet and not the floor. How are you?"

James smiled. "Fine. Can Remus and I go flying now?"

Orion smirked. "I have no problem with it but have you asked your parents?"

There was a chuckle behind them and Orion turned to see Charles grinning at them. "Yes he has and we're fine with it too." Remus and James turned to Orion and he laughed. "Go on then." The boys raced off and Orion followed Charles to the living room where he was

seized in a hug by Emma.

"Hello Orion, how are you?" she said warmly. Orion returned the hug. "Fine thanks. How are things here?"

Emma smiled. "Good. How's Remus?" Orion relaxed into a chair and sighed. "He's OK. He's got used to the fact that I'm not going anywhere, and we're both used to the fact that we're now a family. I'm proud to call him my son."

He gazed out the window, seeing Remus and James playing broomstick tag, and a fond smile appeared. Charles and Emma exchanged a smile; their grandson was clearly a good parent and just as clearly loved Remus as much as he'd loved his future children. Noticing this look, Orion frowned. "What?" he asked.

"We were just thinking that you're definitely a good father Orion. We wanted to discuss something with you, something related to James," Charles answered. Orion shrugged. "OK. What do you want to discuss."

"You taking guardianship of James should something happen to us. We were thinking of writing it into our will," Emma replied. She and Charles smirked when Orion choked on his tea and shook his head.

"Why me?" he asked rhetorically. "First Remus, then Severus, now James. I seem to be collecting guardianships left, right and centre. I understand your reasoning though. OK. I accept, as long as you don't die straightaway understand? I want you to be around for a good long time yet."

Charles and Emma both hugged him. "Of course we will Orion. We want to be there to see James' face when you tell him that sorry, you're not his uncle, you're his son."

Orion's lips twitched, and then he chuckled, which soon turned to

laughter. "Yeah, that's going to be funny. I just hope Remus and Severus forgive my deception of them."

"They will. That's why you're waiting till they're seventeen isn't it? So you can tell them and explain the reasons for it in full. They'll understand Orion. Don't worry about it."

Orion nodded and relaxed back in his chair, closing his eyes. "I never expected this to happen you know. I expected to find a home, a job, search for and destroy the Horcruxes and then kill Voldemort, all while having minimal, if any, involvement with you. Instead I find myself adopted by my grandparents, adopting one of my former Professors, and making plans to adopt another, masquerading as my father's uncle and I still have to find those bloody Horcruxes."

Emma pulled him up and into a hug. "It's alright Orion. I know you didn't expect this but do you regret it?"

Orion looked at his grandmother and then said emphatically, "No! I might not have expected it, but I certainly don't regret it. Getting to know you and James is like a dream come true."

"Are you worried that James and Lily will reject you once they know the truth?" Charles asked. Orion shook his head to start with but then ever so slowly nodded. Charles shook his head and hugged Orion. "They will not reject you Orion. It will probably be a shock, yes, but once you've explained everything, they will understand. Stop worrying about it, the future is never certain after all and worrying about something that hasn't happened and isn't likely to happen, will only make you ill."

Orion smiled rather weakly. "Thanks Charles. I'm being silly I know, but thinking about what happened the first time round and the consequences of time paradoxes, makes me very glad that the future that I remember will be overwritten by this one."

"Yes. I have a question for you Orion" Charles remarked, looking at the ceiling.

Orion looked at his grandfather and raised an eyebrow. "Yes?" he said.

Charles looked at him steadily for a second and then said, "If you could go back to when Voldemort, or Tom Riddle as he was once known, was an infant, would you kill him, knowing what he would grow up to be otherwise?"

Orion looked at him in shock, and then tilted his head to the side, considering the question. "No. I wouldn't. I couldn't do what Voldemort tried to do to me." He looked out the window and his lips quirked in a smile as he watched Remus dive underneath James to grab the training Snitch that he'd brought with him. "Knowing me Charles, I'd probably adopt him and raise him as my own. Imagine the future, with me having raised Tom. He'd probably never become Voldemort."

His grandparents chuckled and followed his gaze to the lawn, where James and Remus were now lying on the ground, laughing about something. The two cousins were completely oblivious to anything else that was going on. This gave Orion an idea.

Changing into Leo, he bounded outside before stalking the two boys. He crept up behind them and roared. The two Marauders looked at the large lion and then roared back before tackling him. Charles and Emma stood by the window looking on in amusement as James and Remus rolled on the ground, trying to subdue the large cat.

Leo gave a feline smirk and then changed into Shadow. His attackers lost their grip as his body changed shape and the wolf leapt away from them. He gave a short bark and jumped towards them. Remus gave a wolfish growl and attacked, trying to beat the older wolf. It was a mock fight he lost quickly as Shadow gently knocked him over and

stood over him. James leapt on his back and Shadow rolled, dumping him on the grass.

Growling, James concentrated hard. He hadn't told either his father or his uncle but he'd been reading about the Animagus transformation in the Potter family library. The books he'd read told him the spell for achieving the transformation and said that the first few times you transformed, you had to concentrate hard on the spell. The books also said that attempting the change shouldn't be done without a lot of experience with Transfiguration and a teacher nearby but James didn't think about the possible consequences of getting it wrong.

Shaking his head, James let his magic out, concentrating hard on the spell and with a sudden POP, James was gone and a young fawn was standing in his place. Remus stared at his friend and cousin in shock, Shadow instantly became Orion once more and he also stared, while Charles and Emma ran outside to join them.

"Now what?" Remus asked when none of the adults said anything. Orion, Charles and Emma came out of their shock induced trance and began examining the fawn.

"Well at least we know what his form will be," Charles remarked. Emma was just staring at her son while Orion was dumbfounded. "I'll try and talk to him," Orion eventually said, transforming into Leo. The lion walked up to the fawn and looked at him.

"James? Are you in there?" Orion asked mentally.

The fawn looked at him and then James' voice echoed in Orion's mind. "Yes. How do I change back Uncle Orion? I like being whatever I am but I want to be me again now."

Orion shook his massive head. "This is why you're not supposed to attempt this transformation until your fifth year at Hogwarts at least

James. I can change you back but you have to promise you won't try this again until you're old enough. Plus I think your parents might want a word with you too."

James hung his head. "I know. What am I?"

Orion smiled. "You're a stag James, or you will be when you grow older."

"But I thought stags have antlers? Why don't I have any?" James asked.

Orion smiled again. "You don't have antlers yet because your animal form reflects your human age. You're still a child which means your animagus form is in its childhood stage too. As an adult stag you will have a magnificent set of antlers James but wait for the right time to attempt this again."

"OK" James said. Orion walked forward and nuzzled the fawn, and then he transformed back. One spell later and James was back, only to shrink behind Orion when he saw his parents glaring at him.

"Come on Remus, I think it's time for us to go home," Orion said, putting a hand on Remus' shoulder, preparing to Apparate home.

Emma put a hand on Orion's arm. "You don't have to go if you don't want to Orion," she said. Orion shook his head.

"I'd rather not stay at this time Emma. I think you and James need to talk and I'd rather not be here while you do. I will say, however, that James did not learn how to do that from me, nor has he talked to me about it beyond expressing a desire to learn how. I did tell him as well as Remus, Severus and Sirius that the transformation took years to learn and shouldn't be attempted until they were at least up to fifth year at Hogwarts. I have no idea how he managed this today, if you find out, please tell me?"

Emma nodded and Orion Apparated both himself and Remus back to Marauder Manor, leaving James looking sheepishly at his parents, neither of whom looked very happy with him.

"Dad, will James be in trouble?" Remus asked.

Orion shrugged as he hung up his cloak. "Most probably. He could have been seriously hurt with that transformation Remus, it's why not a lot of wizards or witches attempt it, although most of those who do complete the transformation are probably unregistered."

"Isn't that illegal?" Remus asked, his interest in learning more about the Wizarding World shunting aside his concern for James. Orion nodded as he wandlessly and wordlessly summoned a book from the bookshelf, opening it to a certain page and handing it to Remus.

Remus read the page and then handed the book back to his father. "Wow. No wonder not many people attempt it," he muttered as he sat down with his current favorite book. Orion smirked as he saw Remus become engrossed in his book and Banished the book that he'd given Remus back to the shelf.

"It is tricky, and some witches and wizards may not even have a form to begin with. It is taught in seventh year Transfiguration, although the theory of human transfiguration is taught in sixth year," Orion offered as he sat down opposite Remus, pulling the Daily Prophet towards him and opening it.

They read in companionable silence, taking a break for lunch and then returning to the living room for more reading. Halfway through the afternoon the Floo chimed and Severus tumbled through the fire, terrified.

"Severus, what's wrong?" Orion asked, before Remus shoved him to one side and ran to his friend. "Sev? Dad, he's hurt. Help!"

"I will help Remus, but I need to talk to him before I can do that, and you're hovering over him, preventing exactly that," Orion said, causing Remus to blush. "Sorry" he muttered as he moved to kneel beside Severus, allowing Orion to examine him.

"What happened Sev?" Orion questioned softly. Severus winced as he tried to move and was gently held down by Orion. "Don't move Sev, I'll call a Healer for you, just tell me what happened," Orion said softly.

"Mum, she, - and then my father.." Severus began haltingly. He paused, and Orion gently patted his shoulder encouragingly. Taking comfort from that, Severus continued, "Mum was talking with me about potions, and then my father came in. He was drunk, and he began raging about me and my mother encouraging me in my "useless obsession." Then Mum tried to defend me and he hit her. She fell down, and then, when I tried to help her he started hitting me too."

Remus was looking shocked and sick at this point and Orion, seeing this, gently pushed him in the direction of the fire. "Get Madam Pomfrey, Remus, call out Hogwarts Infirmary. Hopefully she's in and can come through."

Remus nodded and ran to do as requested while Orion turned his attention back to Severus. "Carry on Severus," Orion murmured. Trembling now, Severus shook his head, and seemed to curl in on himself.

"It's OK Sev, it's OK. He's not here, he can't hurt you anymore, I won't let him," Orion kept murmuring, trying to get Severus calm enough to finish his story. Finally Severus calmed down enough to talk and finished his story.

"I curled up, trying to prevent him hitting my stomach or head. Then

he stopped, and I looked up. Mum was standing in front of me, protecting me. She refused to let him hurt me. He kept telling her to move, that he was going to teach me a lesson and if she moved he wouldn't hurt her."

This had horrible echoes for Orion, the memory of his own mother refusing to stand aside and let Voldemort kill him reverberating round his mind. Mentally forcing that memory back, he nodded. "Then what?" he asked.

Severus broke down as he said, "Then he killed her. He said a spell, two words, and then there was a flash of green. It sounded funny, like Abra Kedabra or something. Then he turned the wand on me. I attacked him at that point, he wasn't expecting it. He dropped the wand and I escaped. I was so scared."

At this point Severus lost control completely and began to cry. Orion immediately gathered him into a hug, mindful of any injuries that Severus had, offering as much comfort as he could. When Poppy appeared in the living room, having Flooed in, Orion let go of Severus, only to find that Severus had latched onto him and wasn't letting go.

"Sev, son, I need you to let go so that Madam Pomfrey can examine you. It won't hurt, I promise, she just needs to examine you, that's all," Orion said soothingly.

Severus shook his head. "She'll tell the Aurors. They won't believe it, Father said they wouldn't."

Orion shook his head, letting Severus grasp his hand for comfort while Poppy examined him. "He was wrong Sev. If the Aurors hear about something like this, then they are bound to investigate it. You're right about one thing though, Poppy will have to report it. It's part of her job to report child abuse cases. Plus, you won't be alone when you tell the Aurors, I'll be there with you to support you."

Severus whimpered. "What if Father's there. He can say he was just disciplining me. They'll believe him."

Orion shook his head. "No they won't Sev. There is a difference between discipline and abuse, a large one. Plus, he killed your mother. He will go to jail for life for that at the least."

"Do you know what spell he used?" Severus asked, looking up at Orion.

The older wizard closed his eyes and nodded. "Yes Sev. There is only one spell that is green, and that is Avada Kedavra. It's the Killing Curse, one of three curses known as Unforgivables. You won't learn about them until your sixth year at Hogwarts but for now just believe me when I say that using an Unforgivable spell on another witch or wizard carries an automatic life sentence in Azkaban. He will go to Azkaban, and will never be let out."

Severus shivered and cuddled closer to Orion, who hugged him tighter in response. "So, if I tell the Aurors what happened, they'll arrest my father, and he won't be able to hurt me? Will I have to testify in court?"

Orion shook his head. "I don't think so. They'll take a statement, they'll take Madam Pomfrey's statement and her assessment of your injuries, and they'll test his wand for any spells used. But they have to know soon if they're to do anything."

Severus looked at him and then at Poppy who smiled sadly at him. "OK. Call the Aurors; I want him to go to jail."

Orion nodded. "Poppy, would you mind calling the Department of Magical Law Enforcement for me, tell them that I need a couple of Aurors over here, dealing with a child abuse/murder case. Then get hold of the WCPA, tell them what's going on, they'll probably send a

representative too. I want to get this all sorted out today, including temporary custody of Severus for today until we can make the guardianship permanent."

"Guardianship?" Severus asked.

Orion and Poppy looked at him, and then Orion's eyes softened. "Do you want to change that guardianship to an adoption Sev?" he queried.

Severus nodded vigorously. "Yes. I said so at the sleepover, and I haven't changed my mind. Please?"

Orion smiled and hugged him tightly, seeing Poppy go to Floo the DMLE and WCPA. Noticing Remus standing uncertainly by the sofa, he motioned him over. "Remus, Severus, do you two still wish to be brothers?" Both of them looked at him, and then at each other, before seizing Orion and dragging him into a group hug. "Hi Dad," they chorused. Orion chuckled and hugged his sons tightly. It wasn't yet official but he wouldn't let it be unofficial for much longer.

The Aurors and WCPA officials arrived soon after and after another emotional retelling of the story the Aurors had enough to bring Tobias Snape in for questioning and after testing his wand, they charged him with murder. The abuse charges required Severus to give Pensieve memories of his childhood. Orion had asked to see them after the Aurors had finished with them, and when he resurfaced, it took four Aurors to keep him from killing Tobias before his trial. The one good thing about the whole business was that Severus and Orion signed the adoption papers and Severus Tobias Snape became Severus Damien Potter, at Severus' own request.

A couple of weeks later Severus knocked somewhat nervously on the door of Orion's study. Orion looked up from some paperwork he was doing and smiled at his son. "Sev, have you and the rest of the Marauders got tired of playing hide and seek already?"

Severus shook his head. "No Dad. I wanted to ask, could I go to the park today. I said I'd meet my friend there, she goes every day and I haven't been for a while. The last time I went was before.." he trailed off and looked at the floor. He heard Orion's chair move over the carpet and then his chin was gently tilted upwards so he was looking in his father's eyes. Black met gold for a brief instant and then Severus looked down again.

"Of course you can go Sev. Where is the park and do you know your way there and back home again?" Orion asked.

Severus seemed to relax, confirming to Orion that he'd been expecting his request to be denied. "It's near where I used to live Dad, near Spinner's End."

Orion frowned slightly. "You'll need a Portkey to get there Severus, it's a bit far for you to walk. I'll need to come along to set the Portkey there and back, and I also want to check that it's safe. I won't interfere with anything," he said, raising an eyebrow as Severus looked about to object. "You know that I like to make sure a place is safe before I let you go to it alone, especially one that's not within walking distance."

Severus sighed, he did know that. "OK Dad. Can we go now?"

Orion checked what he was working on; tidied up the papers into neatly paper clipped piles and pushed the chair back under the desk. "Yes. Let's go."

Ten minutes later the group of five, Severus, Remus, James, Sirius and Orion were all at the park near Severus' old house. Severus looked round and then brightened when he saw someone near the swings.

"Lily!" he yelled out. Sirius, James and Remus had resumed their

previous game nearby, while Severus was standing still and watching Lily on the swings. Orion followed his gaze and saw Lily swing high on the swing, before letting go. He tracked her progress and frowned as he sensed magic at work, slowing her descent, allowing her to land far more lightly than she should have done.

"She's a witch Dad," Severus said enthusiastically, before running to meet her.

"Hey Lily," Severus said, drawing closer.

Lily smiled at him. "Hi Severus. Who were the group you came with?"

Severus smiled widely. "I was adopted two weeks ago Lily, the kids are my brother Remus, my cousin James, and our friend Sirius. The man is Orion, mine and Remus' father and James' uncle."

"That's wonderful Severus. Can I meet them?" Lily questioned.

Severus nodded and pulled her over to his friends. "Lily, meet Sirius, James and Remus. Guys, this is Lily Evans, my other friend. She helped me before I met you all."

The boys smiled at her. "I'm Sirius Black," Sirius said, introducing himself. He held out his hand, smiling at her. Lily shook it and then Sirius was shouldered aside by James. "James Potter," he said. Lily shook his hand as well and then turned to Remus. "Remus Potter," he said softly. Lily shook his hand as well and then squeaked as she turned to see Orion standing behind her.

Orion smiled at her. "I apologise for startling you." He trailed off as he saw Severus' friend properly for the first time. Red hair wasn't that unusual but the emerald green eyes that met his could only belong to one person. Swallowing, he held out his hand. "Orion Potter. I'm pleased to meet you Miss..?"

Lily looked up at him and said, "Lily Evans." Orion shook her hand, and then let go, studying his future mother carefully without seeming to do so. Another voice called out "LILY!" from over by the swings and Lily turned round.

"Tuney, over here," she called out. "That's my sister, Petunia. She's older than me and Mum and Dad said she had to watch me in the park," Lily explained to Orion and the four boys. Petunia Evans ran over and grabbed Lily's arm.

"What are you doing over here Lily; you should have stayed with me. Why were you talking to strangers," she scolded. Lily pulled her arm away and scowled; a scowl which Orion was amused to notice was similar to his own. It was apparent that he'd inherited more from his mother than just her eyes.

"They're not strangers Tuney, you remember Severus don't you? Well, he was adopted two weeks ago; he wanted to introduce me to his new family. This is Remus, James and Sirius. Remus is Severus' brother, James is his cousin and Sirius is their friend," Lily snapped at Petunia, indicating each of the boys in turn.

"Oh and the man standing with them is Mr Potter, Remus and Severus' father and James' uncle," Lily said, belatedly realizing that she'd forgotten to introduce Orion. Orion smiled and held his hand out to Petunia, reminding himself that the Petunia Evans in front of him was not the Petunia Dursley that he remembered, and that she was still just a child and therefore innocent of her future self's wrongdoings.

"Petunia, it's a pleasure to meet you," he said.

Petunia hesitantly shook his hand. "It's nice to meet you too Mr Potter," she said. She squeaked as Remus grabbed her hand. "Come on Petunia, do you want to play with us?" he asked. Petunia looked at him uncertainly, and then at Lily.

"We're supposed to be meeting our mother soon, we said we'd meet her by the swings," she replied.

Remus let her go. "Oh. Well, we can all go over there if you like, that way you'll still be over there and you can say you made some new friends. That is, if you want to be friends?" he said.

Petunia smiled although it was a bit strained. "Alright. We have to stay near the swings though."

Remus looked up at Orion, who nodded, not seeing any harm in letting them get to know Petunia and Lily. He was already thinking that if Petunia could see that magic wasn't bad, then her future attitude towards it might well be different. He followed along behind the excited group of children as Lily and Petunia raced James, Sirius, Remus and Severus to the swings. Severus won, with Lily second, James third, Petunia fourth and Sirius and Remus dead even for fifth.

They settled down on the grass and began to talk, while Orion sat down on a nearby bench and watched. He sensed the approach of another person and turned round to see a woman with deep red hair and green eyes standing next to him. He stood up.

"Hello. I'm Orion Potter," he said, holding out his hand.

The woman smiled and shook it, before sitting down. "Rose Evans. I gather those are your children playing with my daughters."

Orion nodded. "Two of them yes, the other two are my nephew and their friend. Would you like to meet them?" Rose nodded so Orion stood up.

"Oy Remus, Severus, James, Sirius. Over here," he called out. The boys looked up and ran over to him, Lily and Petunia following as they saw their mother. "Guys, this is Mrs Evans, Lily and Petunia's

mother. Rose, these are my sons, Remus and Severus, my nephew James, and Sirius Black, a friend of theirs."

Rose shook hands with the four of them, smiling all the while. "You four are very polite, you must have good parents." The four boys blushed slightly, murmuring quiet thank yous. Lily and Petunia grinned at their mother, before Lily said excitedly, "Mum, can we have them over for tea? Please?"

Rose frowned. "Lily dear, we can't invite someone to tea just like that, they might have plans tonight." As Lily's face fell, Petunia looked a little smug, as if she knew that that would be the answer all along.

"We do have plans tonight but perhaps tomorrow if that's agreeable with you and your husband," Orion said. Rose looked at him and then down at the six children, four of whom were looking at them pleadingly. Sirius and Petunia were the exceptions, Sirius because he knew his parents would never let him go to tea with Muggles, and Petunia because she didn't like the prospect of having three boys over to tea.

"Sure, I'll talk to Daniel and then, well, should we meet here tomorrow and go from there?" Rose agreed. Orion smiled, and Remus, James, Severus and Lily cheered. There was a sudden POP, and the bench disappeared.

Lily looked round in shock as Petunia hissed at her, "Now you've done it! You're not supposed to do odd stuff like that."

Lily looked like she was about to cry. "Petunia hush!" Rose scolded before cuddling Lily. "It's alright dear, it's not your fault," she murmured.

Orion smiled. "Lily, do you want to know what just happened?" he asked. Sniffling, Lily nodded. Looking around to see that there weren't any other Muggles in the vicinity, Orion said, "That, Lily was

what is known as accidental magic. You're a witch and when you're eleven you'll get a letter, delivered by an owl, to invite you to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry."

"Really? I thought Severus was joking when he told me that. Why can't I control it?," Lily asked, her tears drying as her interest in this new world rose. Orion smiled. "Because you're not taught to control it until you go to Hogwarts. That's why it's called accidental magic, because it happens by accident."

"So, if I'm a witch, then are you, are you a wizard?" Lily asked. Orion nodded. "Yes. Remus, Severus, James and Sirius will all be getting letters too. You'll all go to Hogwarts together."

"What about me?" Petunia asked. "Why aren't I a witch too?" Orion was silent as he tried to word his answer in a way that would decrease the jealousy he sensed in Petunia. "Because, because that's the way it works sometimes. There are families who are all magical, the parents are a witch and wizard and all the children are witches and wizards. Then there are families where one parent is magical and one is not, and the child could either be magical or not. Then there are families where neither of the parents is magical, and a child is. It's just, well, I can't really explain it."

"So what you're saying is that my sister is a freak!" Petunia hissed, her eyes filling with jealousy and spite.

Lily's eyes widened and filled with tears while Orion's turned very cold. "Your sister is not a "freak" Miss Evans; she just has a certain talent that you do not. It is not something to be ashamed of."

Rose intervened. "We'd better be going home. Orion, it was nice to meet you, we'll expect you for dinner tomorrow. We'll meet here and then walk back to our house. If you don't mind, we'd like to learn more about the magical world after dinner as well?" she said. Orion nodded and watched her hurry off, scolding Petunia for calling Lily a

freak and attempting to calm Lily down.

"Let's go home guys, we've got dinner in half an hour," he eventually said, turning in the direction of Marauder Manor. The group was silent as they walked home. For the boys it was the first time they'd been exposed to prejudice against wizards. They were all familiar with the fact that some wizards were prejudiced against Muggles but it was a shock to them to learn that some Muggles felt the same way about wizards. Orion was attempting to block the hurtful comments that Petunia had made to Lily out of his mind. At least he now knew where her dislike of magic came from, it came from jealousy.

"Dad, why did Petunia turn on us like that?" Severus asked.

Orion sighed. "Because she was jealous, she wanted to be able to do magic too and she can't. She'll be better when we see her tomorrow – we'll be guests and she won't want to be rude to us."

Remus snorted. "Yeah but still, it was pretty horrible to call Lily a freak though. I mean, even if she is jealous it doesn't give her the right to do that."

Orion nodded in agreement. "You're right it doesn't but remember that she probably wants to be like her sister and hearing that she can never be like her now is probably a very bitter thing for her. Just be patient with her tomorrow and don't react even if she says things that hurt you. Alright?"

Severus and Remus both nodded, and then smiled as Marauder Manor came into view. "Race you to the door," Severus said with a grin. Orion laughed as the four Marauders raced to the door and jogged after them. "Go and clean up then Floo to Potter Manor," he called after them.

Orion smiled as he thought about the upcoming dinner the next day. One thing was for sure, it would certainly be interesting.

Chapter Eleven: Dinner and Unexpected Revelations

"Come on Dad, we're going to be late" Severus exclaimed, tugging harder on Orion's hand as they walked the short distance from their Portkey arrival point to the park where they would meet Lily and Rose. He didn't really need to be holding his father's hand, at eight years old both he and Remus thought they were too old for that, but it was a matter of perspective. From Severus' viewpoint, Orion wasn't holding his hand; he was holding Orion's, and currently using it as a leash.

Orion chuckled. "Slow down Sev, we'll get there soon enough. If I didn't know better I'd think you liked Lily," he teased gently. His son scowled at him and once more Orion was reminded of the future Severus that he had known. He bit back a smile as Severus glared and snapped, "I do not like her like that Dad, we're just friends!"

Remus grinned, seeing a chance to tease his brother. "Of course. That might change in a few years though." Severus momentarily abandoned his quest to pull Orion along at the speed of light to whip round and glare at his brother.

"Oh yeah Remy? What about you, will you find yourself a girlfriend as well?"

Remus blushed and then replied determinedly, "Maybe, if I can find one that doesn't mind my furry little problem." He saw Orion frown at this comment and said, "What? It's true Dad, if I end up marrying, it will have to be someone that doesn't mind my furry tendency."

Orion shrugged. "I agree, however you don't have to sound so fatalistic. There's plenty of time though, both of you are only eight. Leave those types of thoughts until you're older hmm."

Both boys nodded and then they reached the park. Orion winced at the cheer his sons made at the sight of Lily and Rose waiting for

them almost deafened him. 'Note to self, review deafness charms in vicinity of excited children' he thought as he smiled at Rose and Lily.

"Hello you three. Where are James and Sirius are they not coming?" Rose asked.

Orion shrugged. "James and his parents are visiting a relative that fell ill unexpectedly while Sirius is currently grounded. I'm told that James protested rather vigorously at having to go, he wanted to be here with us, as did Sirius."

Rose nodded thoughtfully, before smiling as Lily bounced up and down beside her. "OK Lily, calm down," she said with a smile as Severus and Remus made their way over to them, followed by Orion. Lily nodded, her eyes bright and shining as the group made their way to the Evans' house. It was a bit of a walk, but the three wizards didn't mind. Orion was a firm believer in exercise, and hence both Severus and Remus spent some time each day outdoors. They didn't have to run around, but they did need to get outside and get some sunlight.

As they walked up the front path the door opened and a man stepped out, looking towards them. His face lit up in a welcoming smile, and Orion relaxed immediately. He was very good at sensing people's intentions and he sensed nothing other than welcome from his maternal grandfather.

"Hello, you must be the Potters, I'm Daniel," he said, holding out his hand for Orion to shake.

Orion smiled at him, shaking his hand firmly. "Yes, I'm Orion Potter and these are my sons, Severus and Remus. You have a lovely house Daniel, very nice."

Daniel grinned at him. "Yes it is isn't it. Come in, come in. I know Lily has been dying to show your boys round while we stuffy old grown ups talk – those were her words by the way," he added, laughing as

his daughter's face grew red. "Dad!" she exclaimed, before grabbing hold of Severus' and Remus' hands.

"Come on, I might as well show you round. Tuney's here but she won't bother us," she said, almost dragging the two boys up the front path. Orion just smiled, watching as the three children disappeared inside the house.

"Well that was interesting" Rose commented. Daniel and Orion just exchanged an amused grin and followed their children inside. Inside, Daniel took Orion on his own tour of the house, while Rose headed into the kitchen to check on the dinner preparations. As Daniel and Orion walked up the stairs they heard raised voices. Without looking at each other they hastened their pace, Orion silently performing a charm to ensure they weren't heard. They reached the landing at the top of the stairs and saw the source of the noise.

Petunia was standing in the door of her room, shrieking about having "freaks" in the house, Lily was yelling back at her, while Remus and Severus were looking between the two of them and looking decidedly uncomfortable. Things took a turn for the worse when Petunia stepped forward and slapped her younger sister across the face.

As Daniel moved forward to break up the ensuing fight, Severus put himself between the two sisters. Petunia didn't seem deterred and slapped him since he was in the way. Severus blinked at the slap and then growled, his own hand rising to hit her back. He stopped though when he remembered what his mother had gone through at the hands of his father. Slowly, he let his hand fall back to his side. Through clenched teeth he hissed, "I didn't think it was good manners to hit one's guests."

"It's not," Daniel spoke from behind the quartet of children. Lily, Severus and Remus turned to look at him with shock while Petunia tried to look defiant. Orion walked up behind Daniel and stood beside him, thereby effectively blocking the hallway.

"Petunia, stay in your room until dinner," Daniel ordered. "Lily, could you finish the tour and then play outside for a while?" He stood aside so Lily, Severus and Remus could pass by. As Severus passed by him though, Orion gently stopped him.

"Would you mind if I had a quick word?" he asked. Severus looked up at Orion and then shook his head. Orion shared a quick look with Daniel who indicated the guest bedroom at the end of the hall. As Orion closed the door of the room, he saw Petunia's bedroom door slam closed. Turning round he quietly watched as Severus sank onto the bed.

"What are you going to do?" the boy finally asked. Orion frowned. "What do you mean?" he asked. Severus looked up, puzzled. "I know you must have seen what happened. I almost hit Petunia, Dad. Aren't you going to punish me?"

"Why would I punish you?" Orion queried. He sat down on the bed beside his son and put an arm round his shoulders. "I was actually going to say that I'm rather proud of you. Not many boys could resist hitting back at someone that had hit them. You might have raised your hand slightly but you stopped before you actually went through with it. And I'm very proud that you did so."

Severus looked happy at that. "Really?"

His father nodded. "Really. May I ask what stopped you?"

Severus shrugged. "I remembered what my father did to my mother. I don't want to ever be like him."

Orion just nodded. "I see. So you stopped because you realized that hitting Petunia would have made you just like your father?" A small nod was his only answer.

"Like I said Sev, I'm proud of you. Now, I think you'd better go rejoin Lily and Remus before they think I've killed you," Orion said with a grin. Severus saw the grin and grinned back. As they walked towards the stairs they heard voices from Petunia's room, and Severus scowled.

"Hopefully she doesn't call us freaks or hit us again" he muttered.

Orion smirked and replied thoughtfully, "Oh I don't think she will, her father didn't seem too happy that she'd done it in the first place. I rather think that Petunia will be on her best behavior for the rest of our visit."

The two Potters chuckled as they walked down the stairs and outside into the garden, Orion suppressing a shudder as he noticed that there was a small cupboard under the stairs. He didn't know however, that Rose had seen the minute shiver that still manifested in spite of his effort to hide it, nor did he see the way her eyes narrowed in suspicion and puzzlement.

While the three children played a game of hide and seek, Orion was looking round the garden and down the street. The surroundings were similar to Privet Drive but the people were nicer and not as snobby. He was so absorbed in his memories and comparing them to where he was now that he jumped when Rose tapped his shoulder.

"Sorry" she said when he turned to face her. "It's dinner time, I was just going to call in our kids." Orion smiled at her. "OK. Shall I go in then, while you round up our three explorers?" Rose laughed and nodded, so Orion headed inside the house, pausing once more to glare at the cupboard before walking into the living room and then through into the dining room.

"Orion, what would you like to drink?" Daniel asked, walking in with a bottle of wine.

Seeing the wine Orion grinned – it was his favorite brand. "A glass of wine would be great thanks" he said as he sat down. Noise from the entrance hall and then the stairs told him that Lily, Remus and Severus were busy cleaning up. They soon appeared, laughing and breathless from the game which had turned from hide and seek into a game of tag.

"Had fun?" Orion enquired, and was almost blinded by three dazzling smiles and a chorus of "Yes."

When they were all seated Remus looked round with a small frown. "Mr Evans" he said.

Daniel looked at him. "Yes Remus" he replied. Remus looked a bit uncertain and then asked "Is Petunia not joining us?"

"She should be, maybe she's not sure of how you'll take her being here," Daniel said.

Remus shrugged. "Oh." He was saved from having to say anything else when Petunia arrived. She chose to sit between her parents, and coincidentally right across from Orion.

Relations between Lily and Petunia were noticeably strained, which put a small dampener on the mood around the table, even though Daniel and Rose attempted to make up for it by asking many questions about the magical world. Some questions Remus and Severus answered, but the majority was answered by Orion. Once dinner was over, Petunia escaped back to her room, clearly not comfortable around the three wizards. Remus and Severus were dragged off by Lily so that "the old folk can discuss boring stuff."

"Old folk indeed" Orion huffed indignantly, but the amused grin he was wearing betrayed his real feelings.

Rose just shook her head. "She's quite the handful at times," was all

she said. Orion had to agree.

"So, what else do you wish to know about the magical world," he said as he settled on the couch.

Daniel sipped his wine and looked thoughtful. "You mentioned it's something of a state secret. Should we be careful about mentioning it to anyone?"

Orion nodded. "Yes. In fact, I was wondering if you'd consent to me performing a secrecy charm on you which would prevent you accidentally letting anything slip."

"Would it hurt?" Rose asked.

Orion shook his head. "No. In fact, you shouldn't notice anything different at all. It's just to prevent accidental revelations."

"But most people would ignore anything strange, they're like that" Daniel put in, a bit confused.

Orion shrugged in response. "Yes, however the Wizarding World is very big on keeping the existence of magic a secret. They think that if the Wizarding World were to be exposed there'd be another witch hunt – or worse, scientists might try and dissect wizards and witches to find out how they can do magic."

"That wouldn't happen though" Rose objected.

Orion sighed. "Maybe the majority wouldn't but there will always be people who fear what they don't understand and fear breeds anger and hatred."

"You sound like you have personal experience of that," Daniel observed. He was very interested in learning more about magic, and he liked the wizard sitting across from him more and more as the

night wore on.

"I do," Orion finally replied flatly after a brief silence. He ran a hand through his hair in frustration as he realized that his grandparents, although they didn't know of their relationship to him, weren't going to let it go.

"Alright. My parents were killed when I was a year old and I was sent to my mother's sister and her husband, both of whom were Muggles. They had a son around my age as well. My aunt had hated my mother because she was magical and my aunt wasn't, and she transferred that hatred to me. From the time I was dropped on their doorstep to my eleventh birthday, I was told magic didn't exist, that my parents were drunks who had died in a car accident, and that I was a freak whom nobody could ever love. My bedroom was the cupboard under the stairs."

"That's why you don't seem to like our cupboard," Rose commented after she'd got over her shock.

Orion just smiled rather bitterly. "Yes. Now, my aunt knew that magic existed, and instead of loving me and raising me like a member of the family, she chose to belittle me and actively encourage her own son in beating me up. Instead of accepting magic, she hated it. That's why the Wizarding World wants to stay hidden, because of people like my aunt and uncle."

"I see," Daniel said slowly as he digested the fact that Orion certainly had reason to dislike Muggles should he choose to. "May I ask why you don't dislike all, I believe you call us Muggles?" he said.

Orion smiled. "I had a wonderful friend, who I later ended up marrying, who was a muggleborn witch, very much like Lily in fact. She introduced me to her parents and they were very accepting of her magical ability, if a bit confused by it. They, and other people that helped me in this world, are the reason that I didn't join the Dark Lord

of my time and kill everyone in my path."

"The Dark Lord of your time?" Rose asked. Orion paled, he'd just accidentally revealed something he didn't want them knowing. "Orion? What did you mean?" Rose questioned.

"Damn," Orion muttered under his breath before giving his grandparents a piercing look. "Before we go any further I am going to have to place that secrecy charm on you. The question is, do you want it to cover any knowledge of the magical world or just what I'm about to tell you?"

Rose and Daniel had a silent conversation and then Daniel answered, "Just what you're about to tell us. Petunia and Lily won't tell anyone we know about the magical world, and neither will we. We'll just say she got an invitation to attend a private boarding school for gifted children up in Scotland when she's eleven."

Orion nodded, sighing in annoyance at himself. He hadn't wanted his heritage revealed to this set of grandparents until Voldemort was dealt with but his own tongue had betrayed him.

"OK. I'll tell you the information and then I'll cast the charm. When I'm done, you'll know the information and be able to talk about it only with myself at the moment. You won't be able to reveal the information to anyone else and if anyone should come asking about it you won't be able to tell them either. Not that anyone will come looking, but still, I operate with a "hope for the best, plan for the worst" mentality with this information."

"What information" Rose asked, her curiosity now thoroughly roused.

Orion grinned. "I'm getting there," he replied, getting off the couch. Going to the window, he leaned out of it, seeing that Remus, Severus and Lily were busy playing some sort of game. "Guys" he called out.

"Yeah Dad?" Remus yelled back.

"I'm going to be discussing some things with Daniel and Rose for a while, so when you get tired and come indoors, can you find something to do that doesn't involve the lounge? I'll come and tell you when we're finished."

Remus and Severus looked at each other and then Lily. All three nodded and Lily grinned at Orion. "I was just about to introduce them to Monopoly, we can play it my room," she said.

Orion nodded to her. "Thank you Lily that would be very good. We shouldn't be very long."

"OK Mr Potter. Come on guys, I'll teach you how to play," Lily said enthusiastically, almost dragging her two friends inside. Orion just smiled, closed the window and returned to his seat, casting multiple anti eavesdropping charms, an anti-animagus charm, and a host of silencing and privacy charms. When the room was as soundproof and private as it was going to get, he ran a hand through his hair, mentally steeling himself for the conversation ahead.

"You want to know about my ill-advised comment just now, about the Dark Lord of my time," he stated. Two nods answered him. Smiling rather grimly he said, "You've just been introduced to the world of magic. Would you think that within this world, time travel is possible?"

"Yes," Daniel answered immediately.

Rose was staring at Orion calculatingly. "You're a time-traveler, probably from the future aren't you," she said.

Orion nodded wearily. "Yes. I can't tell you everything, nor should I, I just want to tell you one thing and then will you please let my story drop?"

Another silent conversation was held and then Rose and Daniel reluctantly nodded. Seeing this, Orion felt a bit better, he wouldn't reveal everything, just the relationship between them.

"OK. Like I said, I never knew my parents, as they died when I was one. My father was James Potter, and my mother was called Lily. Her maiden name, before she became Lily Potter, was Evans."

He sat back and waited for his grandparents to put two and two together. "Our Lily? Our Lily is your mother? That would make us your grandparents and Petunia your aunt," Rose said in wonder and a bit of shock. Orion nodded.

"Yes. When I came back to the past, I had to change my name. I met my paternal grandparents after saving my father from a group of wizards that were being idiots, and they know the truth as well, although my father doesn't. I will tell both James and Lily the truth when they're seventeen, hopefully they'll be able to understand why I've kept it from them over the years."

"They will," Daniel said absently. Sitting up straighter he suddenly asked, "If Lily is your mother, and James Potter, who I've heard about from Lily is your father then what relationship did Remus and Severus have with you?"

Orion smirked and then replied blandly, "Remus was my favorite professor and Severus my most hated one until we got past the misconceptions we had about each other."

Daniel choked on his wine. "That's going to be embarrassing if they know about it in the future," he commented once he'd recovered.

Orion just smiled sadly. "The future I come from will be overwritten as history changes. My memories will be the only remnant of the future I came from by the time they're all seventeen. I do agree though, that if they knew about it, their reactions would be amusing."

"So, what do we do now?" he asked after a brief time in which Rose and Daniel had been digesting everything they'd been told.

He was surprised when Rose hugged him tightly, an endeavor which Daniel soon joined in on. "We get to know you, under the guise of you bringing your boys over to play with Lily and us bringing her to your place," Daniel answered.

"We would like to know what you really look like though," Rose commented. When Orion gave her a surprised look she grinned, suddenly looking much like an older version of Lily. "It stands to reason that you would have changed your name and your appearance so you wouldn't be recognized if someone in the future did remember your appearance here."

Orion grinned back. "I'm going to give my father a heart attack when he finds out I think," he said. At the enquiring looks directed his way he removed the glamour charms and then gazed at his grandparents with his emerald eyes shining brightly.

Rose gasped as she recognized them. "Lily's eyes" she whispered. Orion just smirked.

"Yes. I was adopted into the Potter family by my grandfather, Charles Potter, as a way of repaying the life debt they owed me for saving my father's life. This allowed me to keep my last name of Potter legally and so I became Orion Potter. Then James said I needed a middle name and I could use his. Therefore, my name here is Orion James Potter."

"Why would he have a heart attack over that though?" Daniel asked, puzzled. Orion smirked again. "Because my real name is Harry James Potter, so he effectively named me about twenty years before he should have done, and then he asked if he could call me uncle."

"Uncle? Oh that's funny" Rose chuckled as she let go of Orion and abruptly sat down, laughing as the situation became clear. "You're right. Hehehehe, he's going to be so confused, his uncle is his son, oh dear."

"Can we be there when you tell them?" Daniel asked, a snort of laughter escaping him as he asked the question.

Orion gave in to the mirth that was bubbling inside him and joined them in laughing about the absurd situation he'd found himself in. "Of course" he finally answered.

"Your eyes are gold again" Rose observed with a frown. Orion shrugged. "I had to put the charms back on; I'm not going to let my true appearance be known to the kids until the time comes to reveal everything. It would wreck what I'm trying to do here."

"And what's that?" Rose asked. Orion looked at her and then stated bluntly, "Make sure that history doesn't repeat itself. If I do nothing then James and Lily will die when they're twenty-one. I refuse to let that happen." He glanced at the clock and his eyes widened. "It's got quite late, I hadn't realized. We have to be going, I'm afraid."

"Do you really?" Daniel asked.

Orion nodded firmly. "Sorry but yes. We can talk more at a later stage, just write a letter and send it in the post."

"Will it reach you? I heard from Lily that wizards apparently use owls," Rose asked.

Orion grinned at her. "Yes it will. I've set up a postal address outside the house, the postman will find it. Some wizard houses can't be found by Muggles, but mine isn't like that. The address is Marauder Manor."

"Marauder Manor. Got it," Rose said, writing it down and carefully tucking it away. "Will you do that charm now?" she asked.

Orion drew his wand in response. "Yes. I have to unfortunately; it's not the right time for any accidental revelations."

He smiled ruefully and held up a hand to forestall Daniel's inevitable question. "I know, this revelation was my own fault but I wanted you to know anyway, maybe not this soon but I would have ended up telling you before Lily's seventeenth birthday. No one else, apart from my other grandparents know the truth about the relationship between me and James and Lily. My boss at work knows my real name but not the names of my parents. As far as the rest of my world is concerned, I'm a time-traveler who was adopted into the Potter family and who works for the Ministry of Magic."

Flicking his wand he said the incantation for the secrecy charm, focusing on what information needed to be hidden, and the parameters of the charm, making sure that the Evans' couldn't speak of it to anyone other than him, Charles and Emma, and that no wizard who was skilled with Legilemency would find it, or even know that there was anything there to be found. Satisfied at last he opened his eyes, which he had closed in concentration and smiled.

"Done" he said, before being engulfed in another hug.

"Don't be a stranger" Daniel ordered as he let his grandson go.

Orion just nodded, trying to breathe through Rose's stranglehold on his ribs. "Rose – I appreciate it but I can't breathe," he finally gasped.

Rose let go, a bit embarrassed but she soon recovered. "We'll come and visit as often as possible, or you can come over here," she said firmly.

"I'd like that" Orion replied softly before opening the door to the

lounge which cancelled the charms he'd placed on the room. "Severus, Remus, time to go," he called up the stairs. There was silence for a second before a yell of "Do we have to?" came back down.

Orion grinned. "Yes we do, it's almost bedtime," he yelled back. More silence before a pair of theatrical groans were heard and then what sounded like three elephants came thundering down the stairs.

"You're really going?" Lily asked, her eyes fixed on Orion's.

Orion nodded. "I'm afraid so Lily, but you'll be able to see these two demons another time."

Remus elbowed his father in the ribs. "We're not demons," he said indignantly.

"Of course you're not," Orion responded fondly, ruffling Remus' hair. Remus just growled playfully and attempted to fix the mess that his father had made out of his previously neat hair drawing a giggle from Lily and a smirk from Severus. A small cough was heard on the stairs which made the three children turn round and scowl.

"What do you want?" Lily said coldly.

Petunia flinched. "I, I wanted to apologise to Mr Potter and to Severus and Remus," she said. Lily glared at her, causing her to take a step back up the stairs.

"Stop glaring like that Lily, your sister wants to apologise so let her," Rose ordered. Lily gave her mother a mutinous look but stayed silent.

"Well," Severus demanded finally, only to be silenced by a frown from Orion. Petunia gulped, choosing to focus on Orion as if he accepted her apology, so would her sister's two friends.

"I was wrong to call you freaks, and I'm sorry," she finally rushed out.

There was an awkward silence before Remus stepped forward. Glancing at his father he received a slight nod. "Apology accepted" he said, holding out his hand. Petunia came down the stairs and gingerly shook it. She then looked at Severus. "I'm sorry for hitting you" she said, holding out her hand. Severus almost didn't take it, but a firm nudge from Orion propelled him forward and he shook the offered hand with reluctance. "Accepted" was all he said and he retreated to stand beside Lily.

Petunia then looked at Orion who inclined his head, his eyes never leaving hers. "Apology accepted Petunia. We're not that different you know and being different doesn't mean we're worse or better than you. Just remember that the next time you're about to judge someone because they're not like you." Petunia nodded and ran back up the stairs, not wanting to be near her sister any longer than she had to be until she calmed down.

As Orion, Remus and Severus walked down the drive, Lily ran after them. They stopped and Lily quickly hugged Severus before letting go. "Thanks for stepping in front of me," she said before running back inside the house. Orion grinned at the sight, while Remus snickered. Severus blushed but said nothing.

"Severus and Lily up a tree," Remus began with a wicked grin on the way back to the park.

"Oh shut up" Severus responded waspishly as they walked down the street.

"Both of you stop it," Orion said. He thought that the hug had been quite cute but he wasn't going to let Severus be teased about it. It wasn't the type of thing to be made a joke of. Both boys fell silent as they reached the park and Orion led them into the grove of trees

nearby.

"Take hold" he said and when both of them had put a finger on the portkey he was holding Orion activated it. They landed in the lounge at Marauder Manor and predictably, in a heap.

"I hate Portkeys," Orion growled as he extricated himself from under his sons. "Both of you to bed now" he said as two yawns were heard from the pile of clothes in front of him. The pile resolved itself into two separate lumps, and Orion experimentally poked one of them as he heard a soft snore.

"Sound asleep," he muttered. With a thought, he levitated the two boys and floated them up the stairs and into their rooms, stepping over a pack of self-shuffling playing cards on the floor of Remus' room and almost breaking his toe when he accidentally kicked a cauldron in Severus'. "Mental note, make both of them clean their rooms tomorrow," he murmured. With a series of spells, both Severus and Remus were changed into their pyjamas and tucked into bed, a spell taking care of cleaning their teeth. It would do until the next day when they'd clean their teeth after breakfast.

As Orion turned to leave Severus' room in order to go to Remus' a hand snagged his robe. "Dad" Severus said sleepily.

"Yes Severus" Orion replied softly.

"That hug earlier - , " Severus whispered. Orion fought back a smile as Severus continued "– it wasn't that bad."

"No it wasn't. You and Lily are friends, just let it be that way," Orion whispered as he tucked a strand of hair away from Severus' eye. After checking on Remus he headed for his own room, where he fell asleep, dreaming of how different the future might be.

Chapter Twelve: A Family Christmas

It was fast coming up to Christmas and Orion was in something of a quandary. The problem: He had no idea what to get his family for Christmas. Sighing, the wizard tossed a catalogue on top of the growing pile in the lounge and ran a hand through his hair.

The months since he'd arrived in the past had been a rollercoaster but his life was beginning to settle down. Remus and Severus had settled into life with him and they were now a tight knit family. Occasionally arguments would spoil the peace and harmony but that was usual with any family so Orion wasn't especially worried about it.

Looking at the clock again, he groaned. Getting up, he stretched his arms above his head, yawning widely. He'd sent Remus and Severus to visit James at Potter Manor while he did some more research on the Horcruxes, and also worried over the knotty problem of Christmas presents.

Activating the Floo he stuck his head in. "Anyone home?" he called out. Silence met his request briefly until there was a yell of "Uncle Orion!" from James and "Dad!" from Severus and Remus, and the trio of excited eight year olds came running into view.

"Hello terrors," Orion said with a grin. James rolled his eyes and said, "We're not terrors Uncle Orion, we're Marauders."

"Yes I know. Now may I come through?" Orion asked.

James looked at his cousins and grinned, a spark of mischief in his eyes. "I don't know, should we let you?"

Orion just waited patiently, he knew James pretty well by now, and knew that he wouldn't let him stay in the fire all that long. His internal musings were interrupted when three pairs of hands seized his head

and pulled strongly.

With a yelp of mingled shock and pain Orion was pulled through the fire, ably assisted by the three boys. When he was fully through he rubbed his neck and smiled ruefully.

"Thank you. Have you had fun?"

He directed his question to Severus and Remus. Both nodded enthusiastically.

"Uncle Charles said that we can stay for dinner if we want," Remus said with a large smile, bouncing up and down with eagerness. Severus joined in the bouncing and grinned at Orion, his eyes quite clearly conveying the message, 'Please'

"Oh alright, we can stay," Orion laughed, privately thinking that staying for dinner would give him the opportunity to pick his grandparents' brains for present ideas.

After a noisy dinner which reminded Orion of meals at the Burrow in the future, the boys were sent off to play until it was time for Severus, Remus and Orion to leave. Sitting in the lounge, holding a glass of Firewhiskey, Orion leaned back in his chair and asked, "What do I get everyone for Christmas?"

His grandparents chuckled. "Have you tried asking them?" Emma said with a laugh.

Orion just stared at her. "No, not yet. Is that the best way to do it?"

"It's the best way if you don't know what they'd like," Charles said, smothering his chuckles with difficulty.

Orion nodded thoughtfully. "I might as well start with you two then, what would you like?"

Charles and Emma looked at each other. "Hmm, well, what we'd really like is a picture of you and your family from the future, but it's not a gift one can open in front of the kids," Emma mused.

"It is if the picture is spelled to be blank to anyone other than the two of you," Orion offered.

His grandparents smiled. "True. OK, that's the two of us settled. Go ask the kids what they'd like," Charles said.

Going up the stairs, Orion heard conversation coming from James' bedroom.

"...Yes but what to get Uncle Orion though. I've got yours, and Mum's and Dad's. What would Uncle Orion like?" James was asking. Orion smothered a laugh, here he was worrying about what to get them and they were worrying about what to get him.

"We could try asking each other what we want," he said, walking into the room. Three heads whipped round as the boys realized that they'd been overheard.

"Um, how much did you hear?" James asked.

Orion just smiled and sat down. "Just you worrying about what to get me for Christmas. I'd like to ask all of you the same thing actually. What do you want for Christmas?"

James, Remus and Severus looked at each other, and then at Orion, their eyes beginning to gleam with excitement. Orion had a moment to wonder exactly what he'd got himself into before three very long lists were presented.

"Hmm, new brooms, a set of Quidditch equipment, a Potions set, my, you want a lot don't you," he teased, setting the lists down. As the

kids' faces fell Orion grinned. "Relax guys. I can't promise everything on these lists, but you will get some of them."

"What do you want though Dad?" Remus asked, looking worried. He and Severus had no idea what to get for the man that had rescued both of them and given them a new home and a better life. They'd presented him with a new cloak for his birthday during the summer holidays as his old one was getting frayed round the edges, but they wanted to get him something different for Christmas.

"I have no idea," Orion responded quietly. "As far as I'm concerned, you gave me the best present I could ever have had when you both allowed me to adopt you. However, if you really want to get me something, um, talk to your uncle."

"But what about me?" James asked. Orion smiled.

"Same answer James, only for you it would be talk to your father. I will say this though: I will like anything you three come up with for me OK. There is no right or wrong present when it comes to me."

He left them then, going back downstairs to spend some more time with Charles and Emma. While the three boys were engrossed in planning Christmas presents, he was going to learn more Potter family history.

"So how did the present talk go?" Emma asked. Orion just shook his head.

"Be prepared for all three to ask what present to get me. Oh and what was that "Uncle Charles" bit?"

Charles looked embarrassed for a brief moment. "Well, if James calls you Uncle Orion, we figured your sons could call us Uncle Charles and Aunt Emma."

"And the family tree grows ever more confused," Orion said with a grin. Charles and Emma just grinned back.

"So, what were you planning to get them?" Orion asked.

"Have they given you their lists yet?" Emma responded.

Orion chuckled before producing the lists and handing them over. "I was thinking about getting Severus that Junior Potions Master kit he wanted, and Remus wants a new broom as well as some more books. James, well, I wanted to consult with you as to what to get him."

"We're getting him a new broom, his old one's just about worn out so why don't you get him a set of Quidditch equipment," Charles suggested. Orion smiled.

"Perfect."

"Now, Orion what do you want," Charles asked seriously.

Orion groaned. "As I told the boys, I've already got everything I could want, a new family, well, sort of new anyway, and I have no idea really what you could give me. I'll give you the same answer I gave them: I will be happy with anything you choose for me."

Emma and Charles shared a look, they didn't quite know what to do with that information but they'd give it their best shot anyway. They were distracted from their thoughts when the trio of young Potters came thundering down the stairs, sounding like a herd of young elephants.

"When you've quite finished doing your elephant impersonation, it's time for us to head home," Orion said with a smirk. A chorus of groans greeted that statement.

"Uncle Orion, can't you all stay?" James asked with just the slightest hint of a whine.

Orion frowned. "Unfortunately we can't James, you all have school tomorrow and I have to check in with my team at work. Plus you're all tired and I'm sure you want to sleep. You can see them tomorrow anyway."

James scowled but knew that he couldn't change his uncle's mind. "OK then. I'll see you tomorrow," he said just before a yawn escaped him. Orion smiled and gently hugged him, before releasing him and moving towards the fireplace. Remus and Severus followed him, just as tired as James was, neither putting up an argument over leaving. After sending them through the Floo, Orion threw some more powder into the flames and vanished as well.

The next day, while the boys were at school, Orion took the opportunity to check in with his team regarding the Horcruxes. Kestrel met him at the entrance to the Department of Mysteries and smiled at him.

"Hey boss, I didn't think we'd see you till the New Year," she said with a grin. Orion smirked back and replied, "Yeah well, I was in the area and thought I'd enquire. I've been doing research on my own as well of course but I hope you and the others don't mind that I've pulled you into this project."

"Course we don't Hunter. Tracking down ancient artifacts is a challenge, especially since they're Founder's artifacts. What do you want them for is our main question," Reaper said, coming up behind Kestrel and leading the way to the main conference room where Diamond and Shade were waiting.

Orion sighed. "OK you all know me well enough by now for me to tell you the real reason I'm after these things. I'm not from all that far in

the future – I was born in nineteen-eighty. There is a Dark Lord who will be rising a few years from now who used these artifacts as Horcruxes. He hasn't come out as a Dark Lord yet but he's building up his power base as we speak. Part of that is creating Horcruxes."

"So you want to follow along behind him and destroy the Horcruxes after he's made them?" Reaper asked. Orion nodded.

"Yes. The good news is that he can only create six, the bad news is, despite my knowledge of what they are and where they'll probably be hidden; I don't know when he created them, or if he'll change his hiding places which is why we've been doing all this research."

"So, if you were born in nineteen-eighty, can we know your real name?" Shade enquired.

Orion sighed. "OK. My last name really is Potter; I was adopted into the Potter family so I could legally keep that name without any issues. My name here is Orion, and I'm not going to tell you my true birth name."

"So, what relation are the Potters to you then?" This question was from Diamond.

Orion grinned wolfishly and said, "They're my grandparents."

It didn't take long for the rest of the Wolves to figure out the implications. "Bloody hell, you're masquerading as your father's uncle?" Kestrel said in shock. "Oh boy, that's got to be confusing."

"I prefer to think of it as a giant prank," Orion replied off handedly. Growing serious he said, "I can count on all of you to keep this secret and only use my nickname here?"

"Of course Hunter," Reaper said immediately.

Orion smiled at that and pulled out the shrunken pile of notes he'd brought with him. "Right then, let's see what we've got," he said. The rest of his team pulled out their own notes and started comparing them, making a new list of items and possible locations from them.

After four hours of painstaking research the Wolves stopped for a break. Taking a look at the time they mutually decided to call it a day, and packed up the notes. They'd done some good work though; they now knew what some of the Horcruxes were likely to be. Now they just had to wait for Voldemort to make them.

"Next weekend, we go on a Horcrux Hunt," Orion said tiredly, downing a Pepper-Up potion as he needed to stay awake for a few more hours yet. His team nodded, excitement coursing through them. They knew what they had to do with the Horcruxes, but despite that they loved a treasure hunt, and that's what the Horcruxes were to them, an evil treasure.

Orion Flooed into the Leaky Cauldron and made his way into Diagon Alley. Stepping into the Alley, he headed for the apothecary, where he bumped into a wizard on his way in.

"I'm sorry, let me help you with that," Orion said as he steadied the unknown wizard's packages. The wizard smiled at him.

"Not a problem, you looking for potions ingredients?"

"Not exactly, I'm looking for the Junior Potions Master kit for my son," Orion replied.

"Is he interested in Potions then?"

"Very. He's told me that he wants to be a Potions Master when he grows up. He reads Potions books like most other kids read fairy tales," Orion said ruefully. He loved Severus, but at times he despaired of ever getting him to read anything other than the latest

Potions journal.

"Well, why don't you bring him to my camp then, it's over the summer, run during the day, you get him back at night. Fully funded, doesn't cost you anything and he gets out of the house for a while," the wizard said.

Orion blinked. "Um, might I enquire as to your name sir?" he said. The camp sounded good but he wasn't about to let his son go off with a total stranger.

"Oh sorry, where are my manners. My wife would kill me. Potions Master Gerald Sorenson. I've been running these camps for a while now. No potion is harmful to the kids, and it introduces them to basic brewing techniques before they reach Hogwarts. How old is your son?"

"Eight, he'll be nine next year," was the reply.

"Oh good, perfect age to begin. I don't suppose you're any good are you?" Gerald asked.

Orion shrugged. "I can follow a recipe but my Potions teacher spent more time insulting my parentage than actually teaching me anything. He ridiculed my efforts so much that I lost all liking for the subject. I can brew what I have to but that's about it."

"That's a shame. Did you like Potions before he ruined it?"

"I was brought up by Muggles after my parents died. I didn't know magic existed until I got my letter and the teacher started in on me during the very first lesson. So I never got the chance to actually like it."

"Bad teacher. Still, I shouldn't take up too much of your time. Take one of the flyers, it has all the information you need. I look forward to

seeing your son in June if he wants to come."

Orion stood in the doorway of the apothecary, clutching the flyer and staring after Gerald as he made his way down the alley. Shaking his head he stepped inside the shop, wondering if all Potions Masters were slightly mad, and if they were, was it a result of the fumes they breathed in during brewing?

When he got home he promptly wrapped the presents in his invisibility cloak and put them in the study. He then locked the door with several high-level locking charms, the last one being in Parseltongue. He knew that magical children were quite capable of unlocking doors with accidental magic if they really, really wanted the door open, he'd done it himself at the Dursleys, and his three future children had also shown the same ability. He did not want the presents discovered before the proper time. With the presents secure, he went to find Severus, who, along with Remus and James, was home from school.

He found them in the lounge, working on their homework. It was the last week before the Christmas break and they were all working hard. They looked up, startled, when he appeared in the doorway. The shock didn't last long, and Orion found himself the recipient of three hugs that threatened to squeeze the breath out of him.

"Hi boys. Was school good today?" he wheezed. The boys let him go and watched as he regained his breath. When he seemed capable of listening, Severus answered, "It was OK. We don't like one of the boys though; he seems intent on hanging round us all the time."

Orion looked interested, and sat down on the couch, carefully stepping over and around the homework that was strewn all over the floor.

"What's his name?" he asked.

James scowled as he answered, "Peter Pettigrew. He wants to be part of our group, and doesn't like the fact that Sirius is the fourth member."

"Has he said anything to you about it?"

"No. He just hangs round us with a hopeful expression all the time," Remus answered. He'd had to wrestle with Moony's response to Pettigrew, which wasn't good. The wolf didn't like Pettigrew and was frustrated that Remus didn't attack him.

Orion nodded in response to hearing this. "Well, I think that you ought to ignore him. Is he a wizard?"

James nodded. "Yes. He'll be in our year at Hogwarts, hopefully in a different House."

Seeing an opportunity to direct conversation away from the subject of the young Peter Pettigrew, Orion asked mildly, "And what House do you think you'll all be in?"

He got three different responses. James was hoping for Gryffindor, Remus was thinking about either Gryffindor or Ravenclaw while Severus was torn between Gryffindor and Slytherin. Remus and Severus didn't know what they'd do if they were in Gryffindor and Slytherin as the rivalry between the two Houses was fierce, even in this time. A Gryffindor/Slytherin friendship would not go down well among the other students.

"Don't listen to them," was Orion's practical advice when Severus told him what they were worried about. "Slytherin is the house for the cunning and ambitious, not the house of future Dark Lords. And Gryffindor, despite being the house of the brave and courageous, has had its share of traitors and betrayers. All the houses have their strengths and weaknesses."

"Really Dad?" Remus asked. "You wouldn't mind if I was in Gryffindor and Sev was in Slytherin?"

Orion chuckled and pulled both Remus and Severus into a hug. "Of course not. The Sorting Hat wanted to put me in Slytherin as its first choice. It put me in Gryffindor because I asked it to."

He left the three open-mouthed boys to do the rest of their homework while he went to look over his Horcrux research. Satisfied that he and his team could go on the first of the Horcrux hunts in the near future he returned to the lounge and gave pointers when needed on tricky questions.

Over dinner that night Orion casually mentioned the meeting he'd had in Diagon Alley with Gerald Sorenson. Severus immediately latched on to the idea of the camp and begged to go. Seeing his brother getting the chance to go on a Potions camp, Remus immediately thought of the junior Quidditch camp that James had mentioned and asked to go on that. After some thought, Orion agreed to both. With summer plans firmly in place, the small family looked forward to Christmas.

When Christmas Day finally arrived, Orion was woken up at the crack of dawn by two heavy weights landing on top of him. He cracked an eye open, looking disgruntled at being woken so early. Severus and Remus didn't care, they wanted the presents they were sure were hidden somewhere and they wanted them now.

"Later," Orion yawned, "we're going to Potter Manor to spend Christmas with James and your aunt and uncle; you'll get your presents then. Now, either go away and let me sleep until a more reasonable hour or cuddle up here and go to sleep."

He closed his eyes again and waited. After a whispered argument, he felt his sons settle down, one on either side of him. A small smile curved Orion's mouth as he fell asleep again.

They were woken again at eight am, by Noddy, who informed them that Charles was in the fire and wanted to know if they were coming for breakfast. Orion was much more willing to get up this time and went downstairs, wrapping his dressing gown round him as he walked.

After a short conversation, Orion agreed to bring Severus and Remus to Potter Manor for breakfast and presents. When the Floo deactivated, he went back upstairs and woke the two boys, who jumped off the bed and ran to get dressed upon hearing of the plans.

Shortly afterwards, the trio stepped out of the Floo, Orion not landing on his face for once as Charles had taken pity on his grandson and told him the proper way to retain one's balance during Floo trips. Orion had grumbled when he'd heard that all you had to do was bend your knees on landing, but said nothing else on the subject. Laughter drew his attention and he watched with indulgent amusement as James, Severus and Remus practically inhaled their food, so determined were they to get to the gift-giving. Seeing the speed with which the younger Potters were eating, Charles, Emma and Orion deliberately slowed their own pace, making the eight-year-olds wait for a while.

It didn't take long though and soon the family was gathered in the living room of Potter Manor all sitting round the tree. Following tradition, the boys got their gifts first, going in order from youngest to oldest. The youngest was, in fact, James, as his birthday was the twenty-seventh of March, Remus' the tenth of March and Severus' the ninth of January. Orion watched with well-hidden anxiety as Severus unwrapped his present. He needn't have worried as Severus launched himself off the floor and at his father, almost knocking both of them to the floor in his exuberant attempt at thanking him.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you," was all Orion could make out as

he pried Severus' arms from their stranglehold on his neck. After another moment or two Severus let go and let Remus have his turn. Remus was similarly excited on receiving his new broom, and he and James immediately made plans to have a race after the gifts were all handed out. James was next and he whooped when he unwrapped the new Quidditch gear.

The next youngest family member after James was Orion and he chose as his first present, the one that came from both Severus and Remus. He unwrapped it to find a 100 galleon voucher from Flourish and Blotts and a note. He unfolded that and read,

To Dad

We really didn't know what to get you when you've already given us so much. We know that you like reading and research so we hoped you could use the voucher to pick out books you like.

From

Sev and Remy

It was written in very neat handwriting for eight-year-olds and Orion smiled at them. "Thank you, I was planning another trip to Flourish and Blotts. This is just what I needed," he said sincerely. The sighs of relief from Severus and Remus were almost audible and Orion grinned. "I really do like it," he assured them.

Charles and Emma were next and they unwrapped Orion's present to them. As promised, it was a picture of him with his future family, spelled so James, Severus and Remus couldn't see it. When they were old enough to hear the truth, Orion thought, he would take the enchantment off. For now, he accepted the hugs from his grandparents and ignored the confused looks from the boys who couldn't understand why Charles and Emma were so pleased to be getting an empty picture frame.

The gift-giving continued, going round in the same order, until each person had a small pile in front of them. James and Remus were released to fly round outside on their brooms as the day was nice enough to try them out, while Severus was reading the instructions for his new potions kit.

Leaning forward in his chair, Orion tapped him on the shoulder. Severus looked up, eyes wide.

"I've just got a couple of rules regarding that kit Sev," Orion said with a smile. Severus nodded, not wanting to have it taken away from him. "First," Orion said, "you can use that as much as you want but I don't want you spending all day with it, OK." Severus nodded; he liked potions but also liked being outside and playing with Remus and James. Sirius was alright, he supposed, but James was the one who was closest to Sirius in their little group. He returned his attention to his father, who had waited until he had Severus' full attention once more.

"And second, potions brewing can leave you a bit messy so when you've been brewing potions, I want you to have a shower the same day. It doesn't have to be immediately after, but it does have to be the same day alright," Orion stated. Severus nodded once more and returned to perusing his new kit.

The vials were self-refilling up to a point. The information said that it had enough for a hundred potions, or, given the age range the kits were designed for, attempts at potions. Knowing that he wouldn't get an answer from Severus until he'd finished examining everything; Orion left him to it, with one more instruction to not try any brewing until they were back home. Orion had set aside an area of the kitchen which was where Severus could do potions brewing in relative safety. He had an idea for what to give Severus for his ninth birthday but he needed to talk to someone else about it first.

Checking once more to see that Severus was OK, Orion stepped outside. Remus and James had tired of racing and were now floating in mid-air talking about something. Charles and Emma were watching them so Orion went over to join them.

"Is Severus OK?" Emma asked.

Orion grinned. "He's fine. He knows we're all outside, but he's so engrossed in that potions kit that suggesting that he come outside before he's finished examining it in minute detail is a futile exercise. He'll be fine."

Charles and Emma nodded, putting up a privacy charm so they could discuss issues of the future with Orion without the danger of James or Remus overhearing. Once they heard that Orion would be going on the first of his Horcrux hunts on the coming weekend they promptly admonished him to be careful, which brought a surprised look from Orion.

"I've done this before," he pointed out reasonably.

His grandparents sighed. "We know you have Orion, but we do feel responsible for you, and we care about you. We wouldn't want you to get hurt, or Merlin forbid, killed, especially not now," Emma replied.

Orion didn't need her not so subtle glance towards the children to understand what she meant. In an even tone of voice he said, "I have no intention of dying Emma. I know how to handle Horcruxes and I'll have my team with me. Remus and Severus are joining James at Sirius' home next Saturday for a visit, during which I'll be destroying that Horcrux. Everything will be fine."

Charles and Emma didn't look convinced but they realized that Orion needed to hunt down the Horcruxes so they didn't complain. Instead, they watched with barely concealed mirth when there was an explosion from indoors and Orion's head jerked up before he jumped

from his seat and ran inside.

The sight that greeted him caused Orion to stop and stare. Severus was sitting in front of the pewter cauldron that had come with the potions kit, his hair standing on end and the remains of a failed potion all over his clothes. The cauldron had a self-heating charm on it, designed specifically so that young children didn't need to be near a burning flame. The cauldron's inside was blackened, and a sludgy mess had adhered to the inner surface. Severus himself, apart from his hair and clothes, was fine, if a bit shocked.

Black eyes met gold as Severus looked rather sheepishly at his father. Orion shook his head and drew his wand. He frowned when Severus couldn't quite stop himself from flinching, but flicked it and cleaned the soot off his son.

"I distinctly remember telling you not five minutes ago that you weren't to try anything until we got home," Orion remarked, his tone cool but not angry.

Severus looked even more sheepish and replied, "Sorry Dad. I wasn't deliberately trying anything; I just put the ingredients in the cauldron and then tapped the side with my finger. It just happened, the cauldron heated up, and then there was this bubbling and then an explosion."

Orion sighed. "Well, the first thing you'll be doing when you get home is cleaning this cauldron out with warm soapy water. When it's clean, I'll spell it dry so the soap won't ruin any other experiments you choose to do. However, you won't be using it again for two days."

"But Dad," Severus protested, horrified at losing his beloved new potions set.

Orion held up his hand. "I asked you not to touch the ingredients or try any brewing until we were at home in the proper environment. I

know you didn't mean for the explosion to happen but it wouldn't have happened if you'd followed my instructions. You chose not to, therefore, you won't be using it until the day after tomorrow."

Severus watched as the kit packed itself back up, leaving only the cauldron out. Noticing the look on his face, Orion raised an eyebrow. "I was thinking of your safety when I gave you that instruction about not using it until we were home," he remarked before taking the kit and the cauldron, through the Floo.

"It's only for tomorrow," Remus said, having flown down when he'd heard the explosion. Severus gave an unintelligible mumble and glared at Remus, who ignored it.

When Orion returned, neither he nor Severus commented on what had happened, both choosing to ignore the incident so that it didn't ruin the rest of the day. Taking their cue from them, the rest of the family didn't mention it either although James and Remus gave Severus sympathetic looks.

Charles and Emma ignored the exercising of parental authority, both feeling that Orion had chosen the right course of action, but they'd seen what the kids hadn't – the brief hesitation on Orion's part before he'd acted.

Dinner was pleasant, turkey with all the trimmings, followed by dessert. The slight undercurrent of resentment directed at Orion by Severus was studiously ignored so as not to make a scene. Orion noticed it though and made a note to himself to talk with Severus before he went to bed that night, to clear the air.

The next day passed without incident, as Severus had eventually agreed that Orion had done the right thing, even if he didn't like it, and Orion reflected to himself as he sat in the lounge on Boxing Day, that his first Christmas with his new family had been, more or less, a good one.

Chapter Thirteen: Horcrux Hunt and Sibling Squabbles

Orion and his team slid through the wards surrounding the old Riddle home with ease. They had spent the last few months tracking down the location of any Horcruxes that might have already been made. Through careful, although tense, collaboration with Dumbledore, Orion had discovered that Voldemort had made three already, the diary that Orion had destroyed in his second year at Hogwarts in the future, the locket belonging to Salazar Slytherin and the ring that had belonged to the Gaunt family. It was the ring that the Wolves were after tonight, and they were determined to get it.

The five Unspeakables slipped into the house, taking care to not disturb anything. They were invisible to outside detection, and took care to make as little noise as possible.

Once inside, Orion looked around. From what he'd learnt in his sixth year in his own time, Dumbledore had found the ring here but Voldemort had made it into a Horcrux early on, hiding the ring from everyone. It was a stroke of luck that Dumbledore had discovered it and had been able to destroy it.

Orion approached the ring's hiding place cautiously. His scar, hidden by the make-up that his magic anchored to his skin, itched in the presence of part of his enemy's soul. He resisted the urge to rub it, it would draw too many questions from his team and he couldn't afford to answer the questions they would ask.

Coming to a stop before a blank patch of floor he indicated it. "This is the spot; we need to get the floorboards up."

Kestrel and Diamond moved past him, removing the boards with ease. They were faced with solid earth, which they again removed, although more cautiously, as they didn't want to disturb the item that their leader was after. They could feel the evil emanating from the Horcrux, and they shivered, feeling very glad that they didn't have to

deal with it.

Once the ring was exposed, Orion levitated it out of the hole, hardly breathing as the ring lifted into the air and up to his eye level. Closing his eyes, he sensed the spells on the ring and sighed.

"We can't destroy it here," he said in a low voice. He wrapped the ring up, not touching it with his hands. With the Horcrux secure, the Unspeakables vanished from the house, making sure to clean up before they left. When they'd disappeared, the house bore no sign that five people had even been there, much less taken anything. The evidence was in a special container in Orion's pocket though.

When the Wolves reappeared in the Department of Mysteries they headed for the Destruction Room. This was a room specially designed for destroying any dangerous items that came into the Department that the Unspeakables had either finished studying or had deemed too dangerous for study. The Horcrux fell into the latter category.

"Here we go," Orion murmured, placing the Horcrux on the table in front of him. The ring sat in front of him, looking innocently up at him. Seeing it on the table, Orion could almost forget what it was. With a growl he wrenched his mind back to the task at hand. The ring had to be destroyed. He ran through all the acceptable methods and settled on the Fiendfyre spell which would melt the ring and destroy the soul piece completely.

Standing well back from the table, Orion leveled his wand at the ring and said the incantation. Purple flames leapt from his wand and raced towards the ring, engulfing it, and Orion fancied that he could almost hear the soul piece scream in agony. When he saw the ring was now a blob of melted gold, he stopped the spell.

"Area secure," he said, after Vanishing the gold blob on the table, and checking himself for any little clue that the Horcrux might have

affected him after its destruction. Finding none, he stepped out of the room, finding his team waiting for him.

"All done Hunter?" Kestrel asked. Orion nodded.

"Yes. One down, five to go. He has two of those already made and three more that he'll create over the next decade. We've got our work cut out for us. Still, we now know that he's got one less than he already had."

"Won't he know what's happened?" Jade asked.

Orion shook his head. "No. If he does somehow realize what's happened, he won't be able to do anything about it. You can't split your soul any more than six times, into seven pieces in other words. He can't make another to replace the ring."

The other Unspeakables nodded. "That's good," Diamond remarked.

Orion nodded again. "Yes it is. Take the rest of the day off, we haven't got anything else to do and dealing with these things is stressful and demanding. I'll be at home if you wish to contact me, otherwise I'll see you on Monday morning."

His team nodded and Disapparated with soft pops. Orion smiled, and Disapparated home. He wanted to sit down and have a bit of relaxation time before he was inundated with eight-year-olds again. Severus and Remus were more than likely to invite James over when they returned from Sirius' house and Orion wanted to gather some energy before that happened. The trio was very like how Orion remembered Fred and George being, and he wondered, not for the first time, how Arthur and Molly Weasley had handled them when they were too young to go to Hogwarts. Grabbing a book that detailed the war against Grindelwald, Orion settled down to read.

Time seemed to fly by and soon Orion's reading was interrupted by

the arrival of Severus and Remus. Just as Orion had thought, they'd invited James, but he was surprised to see that they'd invited Sirius as well.

"Hi Dad. Can we have Sirius and James to tea and also to stay the night?" Remus asked.

Looking at the four hopeful expressions Orion found he couldn't refuse. "OK, but have James and Sirius' parents agreed?" he asked.

Vigorous nodding from the two boys in question answered this and Orion shrugged. "Alright. I'll go and tell Noddy we've got two guests for dinner. Make yourselves at home guys," he said to James and Sirius before heading for the kitchen.

Dinner was entertaining as Orion sat at the table and listened to the talk flowing around him. The topics ranged from Quidditch to school to what their parents did for work, to the complete unfairness of early bed times.

Orion smiled at the last topic, remembering the tantrums over bedtimes that Daniel used to throw. His brother had usually been easier to convince, one stern look had generally convinced him to comply. Lily had been the easiest of the lot, as going to bed meant more time to read.

Orion's attention was drawn back to the four kids when Sirius asked, "Mr Potter, um, what do you do for a job? All Sev and Remy will say is that you work for the Ministry."

Orion leaned back in his chair while he thought of how best to answer. "They have been told to say that because most of what my job entails is classified," he began. Seeing the confused looks from Sirius and James, he elaborated. "Classified means only a few people know what I do."

As comprehension dawned on his young audience, Orion continued. "I am currently involved in a lot of research, looking for very old objects that have been lost throughout time. These objects are very important and I and my team are the ones that have been assigned to looking for them."

Sirius nodded, his eyes wide. "Sounds cool," he said.

Orion smirked. "It is, but right now it can be a bit boring. Are you enjoying school?"

Sirius grimaced. "I would be if I was with James, Sev, and Remus. I don't like being home-schooled a lot; Regulus always interferes with my homework and my parents like him better."

Orion raised his eyebrows. "I'm sure they love you too Sirius. Don't compare yourself to your brother, you're two different people."

Sirius sighed but accepted the advice. "Thanks for letting me stay to tea sir," he said, reverting to formality all of a sudden.

Orion frowned at this but replied, "That's alright, you're more than welcome any time. Do you have a specific time that you have to be home?"

Sirius looked rather sheepish. "Actually sir, my parents said that they wanted me out of the house tonight. That's why Remus and Sev invited me here; they heard my parents tell me to stay out tonight."

Orion looked at Remus and Severus with a frown. "Is that true?" he asked.

Remus and Severus, along with James, scowled back at him. "Yes," they said in unison.

Orion thought quickly. "Let me make a firecall and if your parents

haven't changed their minds then you're welcome to stay the night Sirius," he said, getting up. As dinner had finished, Noddy appeared to clear the dishes away and the four boys retired to the lounge.

When Orion made the firecall he found Sirius' father sitting in his living room, staring at a glass of what Orion thought was firewhiskey. It didn't take long for the Black patriarch to notice him and a tired smile lit his face.

"Leo, how are you," he asked.

Orion smiled. "Good thanks. I've got your eldest son here; he told me that you and your wife threw him out tonight."

Orion Black frowned. "I most certainly did not," he said firmly. "Walburga was talking to someone on the Floo and Sirius wanted something. She told him to leave and when he asked where she said "Anywhere but here." He must have taken that the wrong way."

Orion was frowning in concentration. "I see. My sons and my nephew also overheard and they drew the same conclusion as Sirius. Do you wish him back tonight because I think that Severus and Remus would quite like him to stay the night?"

Sirius' father smiled in relief. "Could you tell him that I'd like to talk with him? I have no objection to him spending the night with you, but I'd like to get this misunderstanding straightened out first."

Orion nodded. "OK. You should know that he thinks that you and Walburga love Regulus more than him. I've tried to dissuade him of this notion but he'd believe it more if it came from you I think."

"Thanks, I'll definitely speak with him," Orion Black said calmly.

Orion withdrew from the fire and called Sirius. The boy paled when he saw his father in the fire but when his father smiled at him he

gradually approached and knelt in front of the fire.

Orion withdrew when he saw that Sirius and his father were deep in conversation. After five minutes Sirius reappeared in the living room looking much happier. "Thanks Mr Potter," he said.

Orion nodded. "No problem. Did you get everything straightened out?"

Sirius nodded and settled down to play Exploding Snap with Severus, Remus and James. Orion picked up his previously discarded book and continued reading from where he'd left off, smirking every time he heard an explosion which was generally followed by a yelp. The game continued until eight-thirty when Orion put his book down and announced it was time for bed. James and Sirius went without protest, Sirius because he was a guest, James because he'd learnt that he couldn't win the bedtime argument with his uncle any more than he could with his own parents. Remus and Severus argued for a few minutes but ended up giving in too. Once the four young Marauders were in bed and asleep, Orion went to bed too, feeling quite glad to be getting some rest at the end of the rather busy day.

The next morning, Orion's sleep was disturbed by the sound of a fight downstairs. Wiping sleep from his eyes, Orion listened for a moment, trying to determine what was going on. It sounded like a purely verbal fight and Orion got up. He knew all too well that verbal fights could quickly turn physical and he wanted to stop that from happening.

As he descended the stairs he could see that it had already turned physical. Severus and Remus were rolling on the floor, punching each other with all the strength they could muster, while James and Sirius tried to tug them apart. All four boys were bruised and scratched, as Remus and Severus hadn't taken well to their friends trying to pull them apart and had shoved them away multiple times.

Orion listened to the unconscious growling noises that Remus was making and sighed. As the full moon approached, Remus always got edgy and snappish, not liking the upcoming transformation even though running with Shadow or occasionally Leo had taken the loneliness out of the nights. The transformation was always painful and Remus hated it. As a consequence, he got very irritable. That didn't excuse his current behavior though.

As Orion drew his wand to cast a couple of Petrificus totalus charms, he saw Severus seize his cauldron and slam it into Remus' head. As Remus shook off the effects of the cauldron meeting his skull, Severus rolled clear and prepared to enter the fight again, determined to win it.

Orion cast the charms but they missed as Severus and Remus moved away from where Orion had aimed them. They hadn't noticed the spells, being caught up in the fight. James and Sirius had though, and they were frantically trying to get their friends' attention.

With a snarl, Remus leapt at Severus, Moony coming to the forefront. He felt Moony rising up inside him and let himself go, transforming into the wolf. Distantly he noticed that he felt a little more in control than when he transformed under the full moon and then Moony's instincts took over.

Orion's had moved into action the second Remus began to transform. As Moony advanced on Severus, James and Sirius put themselves in front of him as Orion Apparated to the bottom of the stairs, instantly transforming into Shadow and moving towards the snarling cub.

This was the first time that James and Sirius had seen Remus transform, although they'd known about his lycanthropy for a while, having worked it out when they realized that they were never allowed at Marauder Manor during the full moon. They gulped as they realized that their friend, in this form, didn't recognize them and saw them only as food. Fighting down their instinctive fear of the wolf,

they stood their ground, even though their legs were shaking and their teeth were chattering.

There was a terrifying growl and then a large black shape slammed into Moony's side, knocking him away from the shaking boys. Shadow placed himself in between Moony and the other Marauders, growling at his cub, daring him to try anything. Remus tried harder to gain control over Moony. He was already in trouble for transforming and he didn't want to make it any worse by attacking his father.

Moony however, had other ideas. With a growl, he leapt at Shadow, who met him in mid-air. Snarling, Moony landed hard on his side, and got up, trying to fasten his teeth in Shadow's throat. Shadow avoided the attack and knocked Moony off his feet once more before lying on top of him and pinning him down, using his heavier weight and larger body to hold the cub still. Amidst a lot of growls and yelps, Shadow managed to fasten his teeth into Moony's scruff and half-carried, half-dragged him up the stairs. By the time they got to the top, Moony was whimpering and trying to get free. Shadow let him go and Moony obediently walked into Remus' bedroom, tail tucked firmly between his legs.

Orion transformed back into himself and closed the bedroom door. He heard Moony start to growl again and sighed. He opened the door a crack and cast several spells at his furry son, chaining Moony to the floor with chains round all four feet and four chains attached to a collar round his neck. Moony's jaws were held shut with a muzzle that was also attached to the collar. All in all, Moony was going nowhere until Orion was ready to deal with him. Yawning he checked the time and swore mentally. Not even nine o'clock in the morning and he felt as though he'd been fighting Voldemort for a week without a break.

James, Sirius and Severus were left downstairs looking shocked. Finally James sank down onto a chair and ran a hand through his hair. "Wow," he finally said.

"Yeah. That was both cool and not cool," Sirius said. "Will Remus be in major trouble?" he asked.

Severus was looking up the stairs, hearing the sound of a door firmly shutting. "What do you think?" he asked. "I think he might have even made Dad forget about the fight."

"Nice try, but you're not getting off that easy," Orion said, appearing at the bottom of the stairs with a small pop. Severus' face fell a bit, and Orion hugged him.

"Are you three alright?" he asked, checking them both visually and with a magical scan for any injuries. Finding nothing except shock at the events he sat down, unconsciously mimicking James as he ran a hand through his hair. Severus sat down next to him and snuggled into his side, drawing comfort from the quiet reassurance that his father seemed to naturally radiate when either Severus or Remus was stressed or upset. He could sense that Orion was still annoyed about the fight, but knew that when his father eventually got round to addressing it, he would be calm, and wouldn't physically hurt either Remus or Severus. It had taken Severus a while to get used to this new style of discipline but he eventually had and now felt safe with Orion in all situations.

"Dad," Severus said, his voice breaking the complete quiet of the room. Orion angled his head so he could look at Severus, who met his eyes and then looked down again.

"Yes Sev," Orion replied, using the shortened version of his son's name in an effort to get him to relax. He would deal with the issue of the fight once things had calmed down. For now, Severus needed reassurance, as did James and Sirius.

"Um, where's Remus?" Severus asked in a near whisper.

"Are you afraid of him?" Orion asked, worried. If that was the case then the relationship between Severus and Remus would be strained and he didn't want that.

He breathed a sigh of relief when Severus shook his head and replied, "No, none of us are, but, well, what are you planning on doing? He tried to attack us."

Now Orion understood. He reached round with his other arm, and hauled Severus into his lap. "He won't be arrested Sev. I'm not going to hand him over to the Aurors, don't worry about that. I'm not sure what I'll do about the transformation itself, but I'm not going to go overboard alright. You do know that I won't hurt either of you?"

Severus nodded slowly and then winced as his clothes rubbed against several open cuts. Feeling the wince, Orion wandlessly healed the cuts and bruises from the fight, treating James and Sirius at the same time as he treated Severus. Once he'd finished he firmly pushed Severus off his lap and said, "Room, now. Don't go into Remus' room."

Severus nodded and disappeared up to his room, leaving James and Sirius standing uncertainly in the living room with a tired and irritated Orion. They looked at each other nervously, neither one being certain what to do.

Noticing their nervousness, Orion tried to smile. "I'm not annoyed with either of you; I saw how you tried to stop what was happening as well as how you put yourselves in between Severus and Moony. Nevertheless, things around here are going to be a bit tense for a while so it might be best if you headed home. I'm sorry it had to be like this."

"That's OK Uncle Orion," James finally replied after a long silence. "Um, will we still be welcome back?" he asked.

Orion nodded. "Of course. You're welcome to visit, but be aware that it probably won't be much fun for a while."

Sirius and James nodded immediately, each knowing that their friends were most likely going to be grounded for several weeks. Then Sirius asked a startling question.

"Um, Mr Potter, can we come over on the full moon and watch you and Remus? It would be safe if James, Sev and I were inside and you and Remus were outside."

Orion considered the idea. "I'll think about it," he finally said. "It won't be this full moon though. Now, I hate to kick you out but I need to talk with Remus and Severus about what happened."

James and Sirius got the hint. They gathered their things and went home, leaving Orion to contemplate how to handle the upcoming discussion. After fifteen minutes, having come to a decision, he made his way upstairs.

Chapter Fourteen: Aftermath and Tricky Questions

Orion stopped in front of Remus' door. He needed to get Remus back to his human form first, as he intended to discover the story behind the fight by talking to both boys at the same time. Taking a breath, he cautiously opened the door and stepped inside.

Remus looked at him from his curled up position on his bed. He'd obviously changed back himself, and the chains had fallen off him as they had been conjured to fit Moony, not Remus. Orion walked over to the bed and sat down. Without saying a word, Remus cautiously slithered over to him and then sat up. After a few minutes, Orion said, "I'm going to call your brother in, I want the two of you to talk about what happened and apologise to each other. I'll leave you alone for that, and when you're finished, I want an explanation for what happened this morning."

Remus nodded, and Orion got up and left. He then knocked on Severus' door. He looked around, barely able to see the floor for the masses of paper everywhere. Sighing, he called, "Severus, are you in here somewhere?"

A dark head popped up from the pile of pillows on the bed and Severus answered hesitantly, "Yes, I'm here Dad."

Orion smirked. "Good, I'd hate to think you'd got lost in all this paper." Growing serious he said, "I've just spoken with Remus and he's expecting you in his room. I want the two of you to talk things over and apologise and then I want both of you to explain to me what happened this morning. I'll give you ten minutes to talk but if you need more time then just say so when I come in and I'll leave again."

Severus nodded and uncurled himself from his covers, making his way to Remus' bedroom door, which was closed. Orion quietly Apparated downstairs, setting a timer to alert him when ten minutes was up. Shaking his head at the morning's events, he pulled out his

research and lost himself in it.

Severus cautiously knocked on his brother's door. When it opened, he said, "I'm sorry Remus." Remus opened the door wider and invited him in. Severus took the invitation and entered, sitting down on the bed. Remus sat down beside him and dropped his head into his hands.

"I can't believe I was so stupid," he muttered. "I'm sorry too Sev. For the fight and for transforming like I did. Do you think Dad's calmed down yet?"

Severus shrugged. "He seemed calm to me. He'd really blow his top if he caught us fighting over which one of us is more to blame though, so let's not go there."

Remus chuckled. "You're right. What do you think he's going to do?"

Severus shrugged. "No idea. We'll probably be grounded for a while. I hope he doesn't lock up my potions set."

Remus snickered. "Given that you hit me in the head with that cauldron, he might very well do that." Severus chuckled and silence fell on the room, neither boy needing to say more, having made up and now they were just waiting for the ten minutes to pass.

When they heard footsteps outside Remus' door they looked at each other. Waiting was nerve-wracking but they didn't really want to have to own up to why they were fighting either. Orion had a way with words that could leave them feeling very guilty with only a couple of sentences. They both looked at the door and then back at each other.

Orion paused outside Remus' door. The ten minutes had passed surprisingly quickly and he was ready to put an end to the entire

episode. The lack of fighting led him to believe that some form of making up had occurred, and he smiled slightly. He deliberately trod a little louder outside the door, and smirked when whispers erupted from inside. Thinking about the decision he'd come to, he shook his head and adopted a stern expression before opening the door.

Severus and Remus gulped when they spotted him. Although they knew that they were in no danger and were, in fact, completely safe with him, the stern expression on their father's face reinforced the guilt they were feeling.

Orion said nothing until he'd closed the door and sat down in a chair, facing the two boys. He then let the silence drag on, waiting for either Severus or Remus to break it. It didn't take long, as he knew it wouldn't.

Severus broke first. In a slightly shaky voice he said, "We're really sorry Dad." Remus jumped in and added, "We really, really are." His voice was shaky as well. Both boys were wondering what Orion's reaction was going to be. He didn't seem angry, just disappointed, but that didn't stop the imaginations of the two young wizards going haywire.

Orion didn't speak for almost a full minute and when he did both Severus and Remus had to work to hold back tears. "I know you're sorry," he said evenly. "That does not explain why I was woken up this morning by the two of you behaving as though you were mortal enemies rather than brothers."

Remus and Severus' faces fell but Orion was not finished yet. In a hard tone he continued, "Not only did I come downstairs to find you two locked in combat, but you were fighting in front of James and Sirius, who, may I remind you, were your guests! It's absolutely appalling behavior and I'm very disappointed in both of you."

He paused to see what effect the reprimand was having and was

satisfied with what he saw. The point seemed to be getting through to them. He had no intention of stopping until he was sure the point was driven home though.

"May I please be let in on the reason why you two seemed to be trying to kill each other this morning?" he enquired, before sitting back and waiting for the explanation.

The two young wizards looked at each other and seemed to come to a consensus. Severus then spoke haltingly, trying to present the reason in a way that would minimize the chance of a parental explosion.

"We were talking about our camps, the ones that are coming up in the summer," he began. Orion nodded encouragingly, knowing that snapping at Severus now would only be counterproductive. He was rewarded as Severus continued, still seeming to be carefully choosing his words.

"Then the subject turned to which was better. Remus doesn't understand why I'd want to spend two weeks studying potions. He called me a mad scientist and said that I loved my chemistry set more than I loved my family."

Remus broke in with, "Then he called me a quidditch-mad furry lunatic and threatened to tie me up and shave me on a full moon so he could use werewolf fur in his potions. That was when we started fighting..." he trailed off, looking sheepishly at Orion, who was frowning at both of them.

"You're telling me that that display downstairs stemmed from the subject of your upcoming camps before it degenerated into personal insults and then into a fight?" he asked. Seeing the slow nods from his sons, he sighed.

"OK. I spent some time thinking about this, and how I should handle

it. Both of you are in trouble for the fight, but Remus, you are also in trouble for transforming into Moony." Remus hung his head, looking ashamed while Severus looked sympathetically at him.

"I thought about banning you from your camps in June, but decided against it – for now," he said, causing Severus and Remus to look alternately horrified and then hopeful. "I realize that expecting you to be on your best behavior for the next few months is unfair so I will say this. One more incident such as this fight and you will not be going. Minor incidents will not jeopardize your chances, only major incidents such as this, understand?"

Frantic nods greeted this announcement and Orion smirked. "Good. Now, you two are grounded for a week for the fight. If you get into another fight I will extend that time. And when I say grounded I mean grounded – you won't be allowed to fly for the duration of the week."

There were cries of dismay at this, and then Severus remembered his plans to meet Lily at the park to talk more about the Wizarding World and possibly getting Lily's house connected to the Floo network. Gathering his courage, he asked, "Um Dad, does that mean I can't meet Lily today?"

Orion looked down at him and raised an eyebrow. "That is indeed what it means. You'll just have to phone her and tell her you can't come. Then I want you to stay downstairs while I talk with Remus about his transformation."

Severus scowled but it had no effect on Orion at all. Both he and Remus knew how to use the telephone that Orion had installed shortly after he'd bought the house and so Severus went downstairs to call his friend and tell her that he couldn't meet her.

Remus was left alone with Orion, and he swallowed hard. He'd known this conversation was coming and he didn't want to try and explain why he'd transformed and run the risk of biting the people he

cared about. It was rather difficult to explain why when he didn't know the entire reason himself.

Orion had kept an eye on Remus throughout the previous explanation and he knew he had to be careful. Remus was emotionally fragile at the moment, due to feeling a double dose of guilt – his own, and Moony's. Sighing, Orion gently ruffled Remus' hair and steeled himself for the conversation.

Keeping his tone as gentle as he could considering the circumstances, he said, "Remus, I'm disappointed that you fought with Severus, but I'm more disappointed in the fact that you put yourself, not to mention James, Sirius and Severus in danger. What would have happened if I hadn't been there? You could have bitten, or worse, killed, any one of them and then you would have been in major trouble, trouble that I couldn't help you out of. Why did you take that sort of risk?"

Remus shivered. Although Orion was keeping his tone as gentle as possible, the underlying firmness and the sense of acute disappointment that Orion was feeling all combined to make him feel guiltier than he already was. In an attempt to stop himself from trembling, he drew his legs up and wrapped his arms round them. Taking several deep breaths to try and prevent himself from crying, he started explaining. "I don't know why I did it, it's just that Moony didn't like being hit and I couldn't control him. I didn't mean to transform, it wasn't intentional. I wouldn't deliberately hurt anyone!"

He lay down on his bed and curled up, not able to control the shaking that overcame him as the tears that he'd been holding back finally started to flow. The next thing he knew, strong arms had picked him up and he found himself seated on his father's lap, being hugged. Gradually he became aware of Orion speaking softly to him, and he forced himself to listen.

"...Easy there pup, take it easy. I know you wouldn't intentionally hurt

us, calm down now; you're going to be sick if you keep this up. Come on, Remy, calm down."

Orion's calming influence worked its magic and Remus uncurled himself from the ball he'd been in since Orion's question. Tearful amber eyes found concerned gold ones and Remus shakily said, "I'm sorry Dad, I didn't mean to. It was like I wasn't in control, I tried to stop Moony, I did. Are Severus, James and Sirius afraid of me now?"

Orion shook his head. "No Remus, they're not. You're their friend and they won't abandon you. I know that you were trying to control Moony, I could sense it, so just calm down and don't get all worked up about it OK."

There was silence for a few minutes as Orion continued to hug Remus, who didn't seem to want to leave the safety and security of his father's embrace. Finally Orion shifted position and set Remus down on the bed beside him.

"Is there anything I can do to make the transformations easier on you, apart from running with you as Shadow or Leo?" Orion asked.

Remus looked up, hope in his eyes. "Teach James, Sev and Sirius the Animagus transformation," he said. "Then we can all run together."

Orion shook his head slowly. "I can't teach them the transformation," he stated. At Remus' disappointed look he elaborated, "Not because I don't want to, but because none of you know how to use even basic magic yet, and the Animagus transformation is advanced Transfiguration."

"But what about what James did with transforming into that fawn?" Remus objected hotly. A frown from Orion silenced him quickly.

"I still don't know how James did that, and I don't want to encourage

that sort of experimentation," he said firmly. "They could be seriously hurt if they tried the transformation now, and I could get into a lot of trouble."

Remus scowled and let the matter drop, knowing he couldn't win. "Um, what are you going to do about what happened?" he asked, suddenly realizing that the conversation had gone off track.

Orion blinked, and focused back on the matter at hand. "You will be apologising to James and Sirius when you next see them. You've already apologised to me, and I accept it, so we're square on that account. Since you're grounded for the fight, I am going to add another week to the one you've already got, meaning that you will be grounded for two weeks rather than just one. During those two weeks I also want you to research what happens to werewolves who transform like you did and then attack people."

Remus nodded, thinking that he was getting off lightly. Orion mentally shook his head, easily able to follow his thought processes. He wasn't getting off lightly – the information he'd asked Remus to research would shock him and hopefully teach him that what he'd done was unacceptable under any circumstances. The potential cost of his actions was too high for it to ever be acceptable.

A knock at the door drew their attention and Orion opened it. Severus was standing on the other side, holding the phone, which was a portable one, out to him. "Mr Evans wants to talk to you Dad," was all Severus said as he looked curiously at Remus, wanting to know why his brother looked like he'd been crying recently.

Remus shook his head at Severus, trying to convey the message that he'd talk about it later, a message which Severus got as he backed out of the doorway to allow Orion to leave the room. Remus followed and the trio made their way downstairs, with Severus and Remus trying to decipher the conversation their father was having.

"...Yes I understand," Orion was saying. He listened for a minute and then laughed. "I pity you Daniel that must have been nasty. No, I'm not going to get into a debate over which of us has it worse. Yes, I'll tell him."

He listened a bit longer and then smirked. "OK. Next weekend then, if our respective terrors have behaved themselves. Alright. See you then."

He hung up and returned the phone to its cradle before sitting down on the couch in the lounge. Severus and Remus looked uncertainly at him, before relaxing as Orion smiled.

"Well Sev, you wouldn't have been able to see Lily today, even if you hadn't got into that fight," he said, leaning back against the couch. Severus frowned.

"Why not?" he asked.

Orion smirked and then chuckled, shaking his head. "Because Lily got into a fight with her sister this morning, and she's also grounded for the week. Apparently Petunia said something uncomplimentary about her magic and Lily attacked her, trying to pull all Petunia's hair out in the process."

The boys winced. "Ouch, that must have been nasty," Remus commented. Severus nodded, agreeing wholeheartedly with Remus. Orion chuckled and ruffled their hair, tugging gently at the deep black and tawny gold locks under his fingers. His sons glared at him, before tackling him and tugging on his hair until he gave in.

A chime from the Floo alerted them to a call and Severus answered it. He found himself looking at Emma and hastily pulled back, calling, "Dad, Aunt Emma wants you."

Orion went to answer the call, smiling when he saw his grandmother,

although Severus and Remus didn't know it. "Emma, how are you? Are Charles and James OK?"

Emma smiled back. "James and Charles are fine Orion, as am I. I was calling to see if you'd let Severus and Remus come over here for a bit." At Orion's frown she said, "I know about the circumstances that necessitated James' early return home, but Charles and I need to talk to you and I'm sure we can find something for your two troublemakers to occupy themselves with."

Orion thought briefly. "Do you have any empty rooms that haven't been used for a while?" he asked. Guessing what he wanted, Emma smirked. "Yes we have Orion, and we'd be quite pleased to have someone clean them."

Orion smirked back. "Very well, we'll be over shortly." He ended the call and said, "We're off to see your aunt and uncle, so get cleaned up and then meet back here." He sat and watched as Remus and Severus dashed back up the stairs to clean up before smirking.

Fifteen minutes later they were at Potter Manor and both miscreants had been set to work. Remus had been diverted from cleaning to reorganizing the children's section of the family library, while Severus had been installed in the kitchen, under orders to clean it until it shone. With them working away, Orion retired to the sitting room in order to talk with his grandparents.

"So, what did you do to them?" Charles asked as he looked at Orion over the top of a glass of firewhiskey. Orion sighed and related a brief overview, ending with, "Do you think I'm being too harsh?"

Charles immediately shook his head. "No Orion. I'm surprised you only extended Remus' punishment by a week. I'd have made it two or three extra, rather than one. Then again, I'm not you so I'm not going to second-guess your decisions."

Orion waved a hand in acknowledgement. "I couldn't really extend it any further, Charles, he looked so miserable that I didn't have the heart to. He knows that what he did was wrong and why, so extending it any further than a week would have seemed like overkill."

Charles shrugged. "And that information you're having him research will help drive the point home too. Don't worry about it. Let's discuss something more pleasant shall we?"

Orion agreed and after half an hour of discussing serious things such as upcoming birthdays and the Ministry of Magic's latest humorous foul-ups, the talk turned to Orion's own childhood. Orion freely admitted that if he'd had parents he would have been different in some ways; his temper wouldn't have had such a short fuse when he was younger and he would have trusted adults more. On the other hand, he could have been worse too – he might have ended up even more anti-Slytherin than Ronald Weasley. Shaking his head to clear it of such depressing thoughts, he was interrupted by the arrival of Severus and Remus, along with James.

All three were tired, a testament to the time they'd spent working around the manor. James had stumbled on Severus when he went to the kitchen and had ended up helping him, not because he had to but because he wanted to. Remus had taken the opportunity to apologise when James had wandered into the library, an apology which had been accepted immediately. At that moment James was looking curiously at his cousins, wondering why they weren't more upset about being grounded. He decided that it was up to them how upset they were, and it was obvious that they'd been forgiven even though they still had to serve their sentence.

Later that day, after they'd got home from Potter Manor, Remus and Severus decided that even though they were grounded, it didn't seem to have decreased their father's love for them, nor had it meant that they couldn't talk to him so they decided to ask a couple of

questions that they'd been wondering about. With that decided, they cornered Orion in the library. Raising his eyebrows, thier father set his research on the Hogwarts Founders' artifacts aside and said, "Do you have a question?"

Remus and Severus nodded. "You know how you said you came from the future," Severus began. Orion nodded cautiously, wondering if he'd accidentally given his identity away. His fears were allayed when Remus asked, "Well, what would happen to the future if you changed it? Would our older selves get new memories or would the future you came from be destroyed?"

Orion looked at the ceiling for a few minutes while he thought of how best to answer. He wouldn't have expected two eight-year-olds to ask that sort of question. Immediately after thinking that he chastised himself sternly. Remus and Severus were very intelligent young wizards and the question stemmed from their curiosity about where he'd come from.

Finally he sighed. "Sit down," he said, and watched with amusement as Remus and Severus decided that sitting on top of him was preferable to the other chairs in the room. He hugged them both and then levitated them to separate chairs.

"I don't mind being sat on but you'd have flattened me if you both sat on me any longer," he explained, which chased away the hurt that had flared in the boys' eyes. "To answer your question," he said slowly, "I would hope that your future selves liked the changes and didn't hate me for turning your lives upside down the way I have."

He was squashed again as Severus and Remus rushed to reassure him that they loved their lives as they were now, even though he'd grounded them, and if their future selves didn't then they were silly. Orion had to chuckle at that, although his humor was tinged with sadness. If the future really wasn't overwritten, and the people in his time were getting new memories then he felt sorry for Severus. The

man would be getting memories of a life spent with James, Sirius and Remus as his best friends, along with Lily, and he was now the only one of the group left. Another thought occurred to him and a small grin tugged at his mouth as he imagined the acerbic Potions Master's reaction to learning that his former student was now his father. Oh yes, that would be a sight well worth seeing.

Returning his attention to the younger versions of his future mentors, he smiled. "I don't think that the future that I came from exists anymore. If it did, I have no doubt that others would have found a way back to stop me from changing the things that I have. The fact that they haven't, leads me to believe that the future that I knew has been erased, with my memories of it being the only remnant."

"Is that a good thing Dad?" Severus asked.

Orion hugged him again and sighed. "Overall, yes it is. There were a lot of good times, but also a lot of pain that could have been avoided if certain things had changed."

"So the only reason you came back was to change things?" Remus asked.

Orion looked up at the ceiling again before looking solemnly at both children. "In the beginning, yes, that was my intention. I expected to change one thing and let everything else stay as it was. Instead I found a much better life here with you two, and your uncle, aunt and cousin, and I have no intention of changing that."

"Oh good. We'd hate to lose you now," Severus commented, before he and Remus decided to see if they could squeeze the stuffing out of Orion. They couldn't, but they enjoyed the hug they got back. Orion hoped that he had diverted any questions on the future for the moment but then Remus asked another question that had him struggling for an answer.

Looking serious, Remus asked, "Dad, what relationship did Sev and I have with you in the future?"

Chapter Fifteen: Birthdays and Summer Camps

"Dad, what relationship did Sev and I have with you in the future?"

Orion blinked in shock and wondered how in the name of Merlin he was supposed to answer this question. He couldn't tell them that he couldn't answer it, well, he could, but it would only make them more curious. Finally he decided to tell them the nature of their relationship in broad terms, without any specifics.

Looking slightly uncomfortable, he said, "You and I had a good relationship Remus, a bit rocky at times but otherwise good."

"And me?" Severus asked. Orion sighed.

"The relationship between you and I was a little more complicated Severus but although it started out rocky it turned into a good relationship later on. Now please, no more questions like that, it's really difficult to answer without giving away things you're not ready to hear."

Severus and Remus nodded and slid off his lap, sensing that they'd accidentally touched a nerve with the question and respecting their father's right to privacy.

"You will tell us one day though, won't you?" Severus asked. Orion nodded.

"Yes, but not now. Go and play but remember that you're not to fly if you go outside. Severus and Remus scowled at the reminder of their current punishment but obeyed, leaving Orion remembering his future and wondering if there was any way of telling the four Marauders the truth, without letting them know that it was the story of his future.

'Wait a second – story. Maybe, if I present it the right way,' he mused,

thinking hard. Maybe if he said he was working on a story, he could tell them the truth and have them believe that that was all it was – a story. Until the time came to reveal the full truth that was. Then he shook his head, discarding the idea. All the Marauders were too intelligent, even at eight years old, to be fooled by that. Especially since if he mentioned scars that his fictional character had, they might be compared to his own. Orion absently rubbed the half-circle scar on his inner right forearm and then the marks on the back of his right hand. No, he didn't want any inquisitive young wizards drawing comparisons between his fictional character and himself. Shaking his head, Orion picked up the book that he'd previously been reading and tried to refocus on possible Horcrux hiding places.

The next notable event happened a couple of weeks later. On the ninth of January, the residents of Marauder Manor were descended upon by the residents of Potter Manor, along with Sirius and Lily for the purpose of celebrating Severus' ninth birthday. He got a voucher for Zonko's joke shop from Sirius and a magical diary from Lily, who told Severus that it was one of a pair and she had the other one. The idea with the diaries was that what was written in one would appear in the other, giving Severus another way to communicate with Lily. Putting the diary aside, he picked up the next present, which was a book on Potions from Charles and Emma, which he saw was a brand-new edition of one that he had been begging Orion to get for a while. A cough from Remus prompted Severus to put the potions book underneath his diary and open Remus' present, which was a new cauldron.

Orion was the only one who hadn't given Severus a present and just when Severus was starting to think that his father had forgotten all about it, Orion approached him with a smile.

"I talked to a few Potions Masters over the previous weeks and they all said that it was important that you had your own space to experiment with. When I voiced my concerns that I might find you blown to pieces one day, they all said that a lab can be set up so that

explosions are contained, thus protecting budding young potions masters from any harm. Shields snap into place the moment something goes wrong so that there aren't any truly dangerous accidents. They also said that the kit I got you for Christmas contains nothing that is truly harmful so my concerns about you being blown to pieces are unfounded and I can leave you to your experimenting without worrying that I'll be scraping bits of you off the floor, walls and ceiling."

As Severus looked at him uncomprehendingly, Orion smiled and led him over to a door that had previously gone unnoticed. "Open the door," he said.

Severus looked at Orion and then at the door. Hesitantly, he pushed it open and then stared in shock. Beyond the door was a fully equipped Potions laboratory, with seven areas tightly warded and one open and accessible. Lying on the work station was a leaflet and Severus' potions kit that had disappeared a few days earlier. As Severus picked up the leaflet, he saw that it was a signed permission slip for Gerald Sorenson's Junior Potions Brewers camp that summer.

"Do you like it?" Orion asked from behind him.

Severus turned round and wrapped his arms round Orion's waist. In a whisper that only Orion could hear he said "Thank you."

Orion understood that the lab meant more to his son than Severus could ever describe, and accepted the thanks and the hug. Remus, Sirius and James peered round the door and gaped.

"Will we ever see you again?" James asked.

Severus punched him in the shoulder. "Prat. Of course you will," he said.

Orion chuckled and drew Severus' attention. "The lab was set up with your age in mind Sev. None of the equipment or the ingredients in the warded areas will be available until you've got to the age where they're appropriate. I wanted you to have something that you could grow into, and as you grow up and go through Hogwarts, more and more of the areas will unlock for you. I had Master Sorenson come through and help design it, so you shouldn't have any problems. I just have a few rules for this place OK."

Severus nodded eagerly and Orion laughed. "Rule One: You never come down here without informing me that that's where you are. I need to know in case there's an accident. Rule Two: While the cauldrons all have heating charms on them so you don't have to use a flame, I still want you to be careful. Accidents can happen so I want you to wear the safety equipment, including the gloves and safety glasses along with the work robe."

Severus had not stopped nodding throughout this and Orion put a hand on his head to stop it before his neck got tired. "Rule Three: If an accident does happen, tell me immediately. I won't be upset if something happens and you tell me. I will, however, be very upset if you have an accident and don't tell me. Rule Four: Don't spend all day down here and when you've finished brewing, clean up properly. Don't forget that you need to shower after brewing in here. Not necessarily immediately after but on the same day."

Severus nodded again and leaned round his father, taking in the details of his lab with wide eyes. His imagination was already fired up; in here he could discover how to stop death, or make people famous. His gaze landed on Remus and turned thoughtful. If he worked at it, he might even invent a cure for werewolves. Orion tapped his shoulder, drawing his attention again.

"I did think twice about giving you this lab – I thought that nine was maybe a bit young, but you'd have needed it at some point so I chose to put it in now, rather than wait. If you misuse it, or don't take the

proper care with the equipment or your own safety, I reserve the right to lock it until you're at Hogwarts. Understand?"

Severus nodded solemnly, knowing that Orion would carry through with that threat if he treated his new lab like a toy, which he didn't intend to do. Choosing not to answer verbally, he instead gave his father another fierce hug that was full of gratitude and entered the room again, determined to examine every inch that was currently available to him in minute detail.

The next couple of months passed slowly. When Remus' birthday came round, he got a self-updating edition of *Hogwarts: A History*, a full set of Quidditch gear, and the signed permission slip for the Junior Quidditch Camp from Orion. He'd also received a set of books entitled *A Complete History of the British Wizarding World* from Charles and Emma, a book entitled *Werewolves: Myth vs Reality* along with a voucher for Flourish and Blotts from Severus and Quidditch throughout the Ages from James. Sirius had sent his regrets that he couldn't be there and a large box of Remus' favorite candy, Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans. Lily had also sent her regrets and had arranged with Orion for Archimedes to pick up Remus' present from her house and deliver it. Right on cue, the large owl swooped in and dropped Remus' present right in his lap.

Opening it, Remus smiled and held up the Monopoly board game. He'd enjoyed it when Lily had introduced him to it, and now he was the owner of a brand new set. He grinned in delight and hugged everyone present, sending two quick notes to Lily and Sirius, thanking them for their gifts before putting all the gifts in his room and rejoining his family and guests for lunch. He didn't mind that he'd got so many books; he was a natural bookworm and loved to read. He just didn't like having to research things for homework, in his opinion that sucked all the fun out of it.

When the first day of the long-awaited camps finally arrived, Remus and Severus were bouncing up and down impatiently while they

waited for their father to take them to their respective camps. Remus would be dropped off first, and then Severus. When Orion finally appeared, he was almost dragged to the front door. From there, they Portkeyed to the Quidditch camp.

Upon entering the camp, Orion was struck by the professionalism of what he was seeing. He hadn't heard of anything like this in his own time, although he supposed that he'd never been allowed to find out. Charles met him at the entrance with James in tow. Remus immediately latched onto James and the two started chattering about which position was the best and what they'd be doing. Amused at their sons' antics, the two elder Potters signed them in and said goodbye. Charles returned to Potter Manor while Orion continued on to where Severus' Potions camp was being held.

Once again, the camp was set up very professionally. Orion spotted Gerald Sorenson, who was instructing a trio of apprentices in the fine art of setting up a marquee. The Potions Master spotted him and grinned, abandoning the apprentices and coming over, his long strides eating up the ground.

"Mr Potter, here you are. And this must be your young Potions Master am I right?" he asked jovially. Orion nodded. "This is Severus," he said, and Severus offered a shy, "Hello sir." He was rather intimidated by the hustle and bustle going on around him and by the apprentices who were rushing everywhere and loudly discussing potions at a level that the young boy couldn't understand despite all his reading.

One apprentice noticed Severus and sneered. In a clear voice he said, "I don't understand why we have to teach these little brats. All they do is blow things up. You, kid, I bet you don't know what chopped root of asphodel combined with an infusion of wormwood makes."

As he knew the answer to this question courtesy of several advanced

potions books, Severus promptly forgot his shyness and sneered right back. In a tone that reminded Orion very strongly of his future self, he said, "Combined properly it makes the Draught of Living Death. It's not chopped root of asphodel either, the root has to be powdered, idiot."

Severus folded his arms and glared at the stunned apprentice, who didn't know what to say. Worried that he might have overstepped a boundary, Severus then turned to look up at his father and the Potions Master he'd been talking with. He found both men almost collapsed on the ground, laughing hysterically. Gerald patted him on the shoulder and managed to gasp, "Well done Severus, well done."

Severus stiffened momentarily at the contact but then relaxed. "Thank you sir," he replied quietly. "I like reading about Potions, even if I don't understand everything,"

"Well, you'll be OK don't worry," Gerald said, wiping a few stray tears away. He turned to Orion.

"You can leave him here Mr Potter, we'll have him back to you unharmed and his head filled with potions trivia by the end of the day, and then he gets to come back here tomorrow and do it all again, and for the rest of the week. Don't worry, he'll be fine."

Orion knelt down so he was looking into Severus' eyes. He relaxed when he saw excitement and determination in the black depths. Severus was still enough of a kid though to wrap his arms round his father for a goodbye hug, the same as Remus had done. Orion wrapped his arms round Severus and hugged him back, before letting go.

"I expect to hear all about your day when I return," he said with a smile. He watched as Gerald led Severus into a building, presumably for signing in and finding out the camp details, and then he Disapparated away.

Orion spent the day buried in books back at Marauder Manor with his workmates helping him. Kestrel and Diamond had checked out the cave by the seaside and reported that wards were in place, suggesting that the Horcrux was there. Tentative plans were made to get that Horcrux soon, as Orion was well aware that the quicker they destroyed the Horcruxes, the quicker Voldemort could be destroyed. When his watch chimed, alerting him to the fact that it was time to pick up Remus and Severus, his team gathered up their work and left. They were thrilled at the fact that they were helping with such an important project, even if they were sickened at what the Horcruxes represented.

Orion smirked as they left and then Apparated to the Potions camp. He picked up Severus and Side-Along Apparated him to the Quidditch camp, where Remus was waiting patiently with Charles and James. From the Quidditch camp they Portkeyed home, landing in the entrance hall. Remus and Severus raced to put away their stuff and then converged on their father, both wanting to be first to tell about their day.

Finally Orion held up his hands. "Both of you quiet down," he said firmly. When the over-excited boys had managed to calm down, Orion said, "Severus can go first today and then Remus tomorrow. Then it will go back to Severus and continue in that fashion. One of you has to go first so don't think I'm playing favorites alright."

When he got two reluctant nods he smiled. "OK. Fire away," he said.

Severus began to speak, his eyes shining with happiness. "We didn't do much today besides go over basic lab safety and what to do when an accident happens. Then we got to brew a potion, a real potion! It was only a simple one and apprentices were around to help us but it was fun."

"And did you get the potion right?" Orion asked, happy that Severus

had obviously enjoyed the first day of his camp.

Severus nodded enthusiastically. "Yes. Not many did, but I paid attention and my lab partner did the same so we got it right. Master Sorenson said my lab partner and I have real potential."

Orion laughed as Severus' arms windmilled around as he tried to describe what had happened. He caught hold of one wrist when Severus came close to hitting him in the head and tugged on it. "Calm down Sev. That comment from Master Sorenson was great. Do you still want to be a Potions Master when you're older?"

Severus gave his father what he thought was a scathing look. Orion repressed a smile, he recognized it as the start of what would eventually become the feared death glare but for now it was just incredibly cute.

"Yes Dad, I do," Severus replied firmly.

Orion arched an eyebrow. "OK. What else happened?"

Severus shrugged. "We cleaned up, so I know how to clean my lab properly now, and then looked at the potions reagent table."

"The what?" Orion asked, confused.

"The potions reagent table," Severus replied, looking like he thought that his father was being dim on purpose. "It's a table which sets out what set of ingredients reacts with what and why. It explains acid and alkali as well, which I didn't get but it was only the first day."

Orion understood now. It was the basic reaction table that they'd been introduced to in first year; only he'd never taken the time to really study it. Seeing his life from an adult's viewpoint he wished he'd been a better student. Shaking his head, he returned his attention to Severus.

"So you want to go back tomorrow?" he asked. Severus nodded and almost yelled, "Yes."

"Remus, your turn," Orion said when it became clear that Severus had finished.

Remus smiled. He was a bit stiff and sore, never having sat on a broom as long as he had that day. Still, his enthusiasm wasn't dampened. "It was great," he began. "We went over broom care and the basics of flying. Then we split into groups and did an obstacle course over a huge mat so we weren't hurt if we fell off. James and I were the only ones that stayed on our brooms until the end of the course. All the others fell off."

"Ouch," Severus commented. Remus glared at him for interrupting, and continued, "Then we had lunch and after that we learnt the basics of Quidditch and the positions. James and I signed up for Chaser lessons. After the basics we split up into our groups, and practiced. The instructor said that the Puddlemere team is coming to do autograph signing on the last day as well."

Orion had to laugh at the exuberance that Remus was displaying. He muffled the chuckles and gestured for Remus to continue. After a few more minutes, he wound down and then a chorus of "What was your day like?" hit Orion's ears.

"My day was spent looking for boring old pieces of junk," he teased, catching his sons in a headlock. "Not anywhere near as exciting as yours. Now, why don't you wash up and then I think Noddy has dinner ready."

As they came back down, he smiled and threw his arms round their shoulders, leading them into the dining room, content to let their chatter take him to a different world where there was nothing to worry about other than which team was going to win the Quidditch World

Cup, and where the worst things he had to deal with were the odd potion explosion and furry transformation. Voldemort could wait, he thought as he laughed at a joke that Remus had come up with. For now, his life seemed to be perfect.

Chapter Sixteen: Hogwarts and Horcruxes

The first of September nineteen-seventy-one was a busy day for the Potter family. James Flooed over to Marauder Manor early in the morning, followed by his parents, where they discovered Orion sitting in the lounge attempting to sort out last minute packing dilemmas. All three younger Potters were racing round and discussing Hogwarts as loudly as possible while their parents tried to sort out what went in what trunk. Once all the trunks were packed and the owls had been caged, they headed for King's Cross, reassuring the kids several times that no, the Hogwarts Express wasn't going to leave without them.

"But Dad, what about that time the Express left without you," Severus asked. James turned round to look at his uncle, a disturbed expression on his face.

"If we miss the train, how will we get to Hogwarts?" he asked.

Orion glanced at his grandparents and then said with a smirk, "I'm sure I could enchant the car and fly you all there."

The panic that had been simmering inside the boys vanished, being replaced with whoops of excitement. "Oh yes, that would be brilliant. Can we please fly a car to Hogwarts?" James pleaded, looking up at his parents.

"No you cannot," Charles said, before smacking the back of Orion's head as firmly as he'd vetoed flying a car to Hogwarts, causing the three boys to gape in utter shock. "You'd be seen by Muggles for one thing and for another, it's illegal to enchant Muggle objects. So, no, you three will be going on the train, and we will not be late."

James scowled at the missed chance but cheered up as he remembered which House he was hoping to get into. Soon, both Severus and Remus were holding their hands over their ears as

James continually predicted that he'd be Sorted into Gryffindor, as all Potters had been through the ages. Finally, Emma told him to be quiet, and he complied, briefly, before getting excited again as they arrived at King's Cross and made their way to Platform Nine-and-Three-Quarters. Sliding through the barrier, James grabbed hold of his cousins and dragged them off to find Sirius. Left with the luggage, Orion and Charles rolled their eyes and loaded it onto the train before searching for their missing children.

They found them in an excited huddle with Sirius, who was standing with them in order to get away from his mother who had been trying to get him to promise to be sorted into Slytherin. Standing nearby was Lily, who was alone as her parents couldn't get through the barrier. Remus broke away from the group of boys and pulled Lily into the group, engaging her in the conversation. Orion smirked as he heard Lily immediately join in with James on the possibility of being sorted into Gryffindor. A few minutes later he noticed Severus edging away from them, back towards the adults. Sensing that his son wanted to talk to him, he stepped over beside one of the pillars.

"Dad," Severus said a few minutes later.

"Yes Sev. What's wrong, are you not excited to be going to Hogwarts?" Orion asked gently.

Severus shrugged. "Yes but James is a shoe-in for Gryffindor, and so is Sirius. Remus will be going to either Gryffindor or Ravenclaw and Lily is so enamored with everything that James told her about Gryffindor that she won't even consider anything else."

There was a definite note of resentment in the eleven-year-old's voice and Orion knelt down so he was staring directly into Severus' eyes. What he saw alarmed him although he didn't show it. Severus couldn't quite hide the simmering resentment and growing anger that he was feeling, and Orion did not want the friendship between James

and Severus destroyed due to Gryffindor/Slytherin rivalry.

"Where do you think you'll be sorted?" he asked.

Severus glared at him and then muttered, "Slytherin. I know you've told us that Slytherin's a good house to be in, but I'll be the only one of the five of us there."

"You're worried that you'll be left out of the group just because of your house?" Orion queried.

Severus nodded miserably. "Yes. And, well, Lily was my friend first but now James is monopolizing her and,"

" – and she won't forget you, or hate you, or stop being your friend simply because you're in different houses," Orion cut in, wanting to stop the downward spiral that was occurring before it took hold in Severus' mind.

"Really?" Severus asked hopefully.

"Really," Orion confirmed. "There were several inter-house friendships when I went to Hogwarts, including one notable Gryffindor/Slytherin one. Trust me Severus, Lily will still be your friend."

"But why can't she be in Slytherin too? Then we'd be even, two Gryffindors, two Slytherins," Severus complained.

Orion sighed. "Severus, although Slytherin is not the house of evil future Death Eaters and Dark Lords, it is very pureblood-oriented. I hate to base things like this on blood but unfortunately, at the present time, Muggle-borns like Lily would not be welcome there. She'd be miserable. You can still be friends without her being in the same house."

"Fine," Severus grumbled, not entirely happy but knowing that what his father said was true, no matter how much he didn't like it. Just then, the train whistle blew a single, long note, and hordes of children started jumping onto the train. Severus looked towards the train, and then back at his father.

Orion led him towards the train, being mobbed by Remus and James the second they saw him.

"Couldn't go without saying goodbye," James said, hanging off Orion's arm. Remus was firmly attached to his middle and Severus was abruptly shoved out of the way as James changed his position and also wrapped his arms round Orion. It was not done maliciously, yet Orion could see the hurt in the black eyes that locked with his own. Hugging James briefly, he unlocked his arms from around his middle and gave him a push towards Charles, saying, "Go on, I think your parents want to be given a goodbye hug too."

Remus detached himself on his own, and Orion held out an arm. Hesitantly, Severus moved forward, being enveloped in a hug that managed to chase away the momentary hurt he'd felt at being excluded from the group hug.

"Will you be at Hogwarts for the full moon?" Remus asked.

"Yes," Orion answered. "Now, you two had better get on board. Work hard, have fun, and don't worry about the Sorting. You'll understand when you're older, but I think it would be very fitting for me to have one son in Gryffindor and one in Slytherin."

Remus and Severus nodded. "OK Dad. Are you going to work afterwards?"

Orion nodded. "Yes. You'd better get on, the train's about to go."

The boys hugged him again and leapt on, making their way to the

compartment which James had already claimed for their group. As the train pulled out of the station, they waved madly, seeing their parents wave back. Orion stared after the train as it started to move faster down the track, well aware that his eyes were a bit damp but not acknowledging it.

"Are you OK?" Emma asked him, concerned. Orion blinked a couple of times and nodded.

"Yes, I'm fine. I just never got to do this in the future," he replied. Emma nodded and patted his shoulder.

"You'll be inundated with eleven-year-olds at Christmas and then it will seem as though they'd never left," she said with a grin. Orion grinned back, his bleak mood lifting.

"Yes. I'll also be seeing Remus every month, so I can get updates then," he said with a smirk. Emma smirked back and then she and Charles slid back through the barrier, leaving Orion standing on the platform.

Half an hour later, Orion was in the Department of Mysteries, talking with his team about the Horcruxes they had yet to find. Dumbledore had told him during one of their meetings that Voldemort had applied for a job at Hogwarts and Orion was pretty sure that the Dark Lord had taken the opportunity to hide the diadem horcrux in the Room of Requirement while he was there. The other ones they still had to find were the diary, Helga Hufflepuff's cup and Nagini. They'd found the Slytherin locket in the seaside cave but it hadn't been destroyed yet as Croaker had vetoed any of his best Unspeakables drinking a potion created by Voldemort. As such, the Wolves had collected several samples of the potion and handed it over to their best Potions Masters. The idea was to create an antidote so the potion could be drunk with no ill-effects and the Horcrux could then be recovered.

"Right, how are we going on finding these blasted pieces of evil

junk?" he asked as he sat down. His team grinned at him.

"Evil bits of junk boss? I'd call them evil bits of treasure," Diamond replied, smirking.

Orion smirked back. "Evil bits of junk is what I like to call them Diamond, however, that wasn't the question. We got the ring, and we know where the locket is, we just can't get at it yet. I've got a lead on the diadem, but what about the others?"

Reaper spoke up. "We have a tentative lead on the cup, and we know that wherever Moldywart is, his blasted snake is, so that's two. You say you have an idea about the diadem, and we've got the ring. The Potions Masters down in the labs haven't yet come up with an antidote to that blasted potion so we have to leave the locket where it is at present. That leaves just the diary that we have no information on."

Orion nodded. "Kestrel, any joy with Borgin and Burkes?"

Kestrel shook her head. "No Hunter, nothing. That slimy git won't tell me anything, and his mind's so disorganized that Legilimency is useless. We'll keep looking."

Orion sighed. "OK. Now, I've heard a rumor that Croaker's pulling us off research and recovery duty to go fight Voldemort's moronic merry men. Is that true?"

Reaper nodded. "Yes. We're essentially to continue what we're doing here, but we have to do it in between any call-outs we get for combat duty. The Aurors are being slaughtered, and there are rumblings among the politicians about giving the Aurors Unforgivable privileges for use on Death Eaters. Therefore, we, along with the other teams, will be going out to help the Aurors."

"They need it," Diamond grunted. "The Aurors are good for catching

crooks but they don't have the same sort of training that we do."

Orion frowned. "Just because we have more specialized training doesn't mean that the Aurors are useless. They're actually quite good, the problem is that they're not used to the way that the Death Eaters operate."

His team didn't look convinced, but Orion didn't press the issue. He knew that some among the Unspeakables thought that the Auror training was a pale imitation of their own and resented it. Looking at the papers spread out over the table he closed his eyes and rubbed his forehead, trying to stave off a Horcrux-sized headache. Opening his eyes again he sat up straighter, and shoved all the papers away.

"Right. I think we've been focusing too much on research at the moment. If we're going out against Death Eaters then we need to get back into training. Let's go to the second training room, I'll play the part of a Death Eater and you lot can attack me."

His team grinned, they loved any chance to try and beat up their boss. "Will you be going all-out?" Kestrel asked, her eyes dancing with glee.

Orion smirked and then growled menacingly, "Count on it. I won't be going easy on you." He got up and led the way to the training room, falling mentally into the role of attacker. He had been researching too long, he thought idly as he stood across from his team, wearing his work robes and conjuring a white mask to wear to complete the Death Eater costume. As the battle began, he grinned behind the mask and surrendered himself completely to the fight. Finding and destroying the Horcruxes was important, but he felt more alive in a battle than he ever did while doing research. This was what he was good at and he loved it. As he twisted out of the way of a bone-breaking curse, sending a modified burning curse back, he wondered how the Marauders were doing.

On the Hogwarts Express, the five first years had claimed a carriage for themselves and were still talking about Hogwarts and what houses they thought they'd be in. James was driving everyone nuts with the way he was going on about Gryffindor, and both Severus and Remus had threatened to throw him out if he didn't shut up. Lily was hoping for either Gryffindor or Ravenclaw, as was Remus. Sirius was hoping like mad that he'd be in Gryffindor as he didn't want to be in Slytherin, while Severus was thinking about what Orion had told him about Slytherin and had decided that he wouldn't mind being in that house, even though James and Sirius were urging him to get into Gryffindor, so that they could all be together.

The food trolley came round and Remus promptly bought several boxes of Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans while the rest of his friends bought chocolate frogs and pumpkin pasties. They had just settled down to eat their snacks when an interruption in the form of Lucius Malfoy occurred.

Malfoy was a year older than they were, and none of the five liked him. The blond second-year eyed Lily and then said, "Well well, what do we have here. A bunch of blood-traitors, and a Mudblood. I'm surprised at you Black, sitting here with them. Aren't you hoping to carry on family tradition and be Sorted into Slytherin?"

The first-years stiffened and James rose, wand in hand. "Sod off Malfoy. Better to be a blood-traitor than an arrogant inbred idiot."

Lucius growled and moved towards James, only to be met with five wands all pointed unerringly at his face. He backed down and retreated out of the carriage. Snarling, he said, "You'll pay for that Potter!"

Severus got up and slammed the door in Malfoy's face, a satisfying crunch telling him that he'd caught the blond boy's nose in the process. Sitting back down again, he continued his friendly debate with Sirius on the merits of Slytherin as opposed to Gryffindor.

The ride was soon over and the students were standing in the Great Hall, waiting to be Sorted. Sirius was first and there was a huge gasp when the Hat yelled "GRYFFINDOR." Sirius gave his friends a grin, but he was afraid as well, as he knew that his mother would not take his being sorted into Gryffindor very well at all. Next was Lily and she was sorted into Gryffindor as well. A few more students passed between them and then it was James' turn. None of the three Potters were surprised when he was sorted into Gryffindor, and James joined Sirius and Lily at the red and gold table, turning to encourage his cousins.

Remus was next and the Hat took a while to sort him. When it finally yelled out "GRYFFINDOR," he breathed a sigh of relief and took the hat off, passing it back to Professor McGonagall before joining James, Sirius and Lily.

Only Severus was left of the five friends and he nervously sat on the stool, the Hat on his head. It took even longer to sort him than it did Remus but the Hat finally yelled out "SLYTHERIN!" Groans came from James, Sirius, Remus and Lily and they watched with hidden dismay as Severus walked over to the Slytherin table. He looked highly disgruntled when he was seated beside Lucius Malfoy who immediately began talking about how he should stay well away from the Gryffindors and that it would not be good to be seen hanging round with them. Severus ignored him and focused on his friends who were all staring at him as well. He just shrugged and smiled at them before turning to try and make friends with the other first-year Slytherins. It would not do to alienate his house-mates by ignoring them.

Over the course of the feast, he was introduced to the other first-year boys. He sighed when he learnt that his dorm-mates only wanted to be known by their surnames, so he committed them to memory. For the next seven years he'd be sharing a dorm with Avery, Nott, Macnair and Mulciber. Turning to look at the Gryffindor table, he was

jostled out of his contemplation of the loud, bright, merry fun the other students seemed to be having by Malfoy.

"What do you want?" Severus growled, annoyed. He'd been trying to send a silent, "Sorry," to his friends with his eyes, and he'd been distracted. Lucius smirked at him.

"Didn't you hear me before Potter? Stay away from the Gryffindors. We don't mix with them."

Severus pulled away from him. "One of those Gryffindors is my brother and the other is my cousin. Don't tell me to shun two of my family members Malfoy. It's not going to happen."

Over at the Gryffindor table, the other four Marauders were watching him with worried looks. James leaned in close to Remus and said, "Is he going to be alright?"

Remus nodded slightly. "I don't think the prefects will let Malfoy harass him, and he's a bit of a chameleon, Sev is." Seeing the blank looks on James and Sirius' faces he groaned. "Honestly guys, you've spent the past three years as our friends and you haven't picked up on the fact that he can adapt to almost any situation?"

Understanding dawned and James looked rather sheepish. Sirius didn't look as embarrassed, as he didn't spend as much time with Severus as James and Remus did.

"We'll just have to make sure that he knows that he's still a Marauder," James said with finality as the desserts arrived. Sirius and Remus mumbled agreements, seemingly forgetting the table manners that they'd been taught in the interests of devouring the delicious treats. Lily looked half-amused and half-disgusted as she finished her own dessert and then looked expectantly at the Gryffindor prefects.

As the Marauders settled into their dormitories for their first night at Hogwarts, Orion was busy telling his grandfather exactly what he thought about his actions before the Hogwarts Express left.

"...Come on Charles. Glaring at me I could understand but what you did was unacceptable, especially in front of the kids," Orion snapped, rubbing the part of his head that Charles had smacked earlier in the day.

"It wasn't that hard Orion, stop complaining. The kids know that they still have to listen to you, and it broke the tension that they were all feeling. Besides, I only did what I'm sure James would have done had he been alive when you originally pulled that stunt," Charles replied calmly, looking thoroughly amused as his grandson paced around the living room.

Orion sunk down into an armchair and smiled rather ruefully at Charles. "I'm sure you're right, and the expressions on the kids' faces was amusing, but please, don't do that again."

Charles grinned and Summoned Orion to him, catching him in a headlock before ruffling his hair. "OK. I won't. How do you think the Sorting went?"

Orion sat back in his chair and grinned. "I'm predicting Remus, James, Sirius and Lily will be in Gryffindor and Severus will be in Slytherin."

"Are you worried about that?" Emma asked.

Orion shook his head. "No. As I told both Remus and Severus, it is rather fitting for me to have one son in Gryffindor and one in Slytherin. Besides, Severus' personality really isn't suited for any other house but Slytherin while Remus could have gone to either Gryffindor or Ravenclaw."

"What about if Severus tries to remain friends with James, Remus, Sirius and Lily? Won't his housemates disapprove?" Charles queried.

Orion smirked coldly. "His housemates can disapprove all they want, but a Gryffindor/Slytherin friendship might start breaking the house barrier down a bit."

Charles laughed shortly. "It might have worked in the future Harry but not here I think. At least not at the moment. How are you doing on the Voldemort problem?"

Orion gave him a sour look. "Not as well as I'd hoped. We know what they are, and we've either destroyed or got leads on three, but what we don't know for sure are the times that Voldemort creates them. This is hampering us a bit."

"You'll get them Harry," Emma said soothingly.

Orion gave her a sharp look. "Why are you calling me Harry?" he asked.

Emma shrugged. "Because despite you changing your name to Orion in order to avoid a lot of awkward questions, inside, where you still cling to your past, you are Harry Potter, James' son, our grandson. We thought it was time to remind you of that fact."

Orion let his head drop into his hands. In a muffled voice he said, "Thanks. I think I'll go to bed, let everything go for tonight."

Charles and Emma nodded and watched him leave. As he was walking through the living room door Charles called out, "Orion. Just so you know, Albus Dumbledore is dropping round for dinner tomorrow night. He wishes to talk to you."

"What does he want to talk about?" Orion asked after a few minutes.

Charles hesitated, not wanting to spark off any explosions from Orion. His grandson could have a volatile reaction to Dumbledore at times. Even the semi-frequent meetings over the past three years hadn't helped to thaw Orion's demeanor towards the ancient wizard. He returned from those meetings tense and upset, and it took hours for him to calm down again.

"He wants to talk about your past, and what his future self did to make you hate him so much that you're willing to believe the worst of this version of him."

Orion tensed and Charles expected him to explode. In a quiet, cold voice which sent shivers up Charles' spine, Orion responded, "I have told him all he needs to know. I am attempting to get past what his future self did, but it's difficult."

"What did he do to make you hate him so much though? I mean, you've told us a little bit of the future version of Severus, and from your experiences with him, one would have expected you to hate him too."

Orion turned round and gave his grandfather a bitter smile. "The Severus Snape I knew then and the Severus Potter I know now are two different people. When I met Severus in this time, he was a boy, and was innocent of what his future self did to me."

"Then why aren't you willing to extend the same thinking to Albus?" Emma asked, the question having a sharpness to it that caught Orion by surprise.

"Because Albus Dumbledore isn't an innocent child and he's driving me mad with his politely phrased orders and fishing expeditions and his attempts to manipulate me into becoming some sort of Light Side soldier for him," Orion hissed, his entire body screaming his discomfort with the situation in which he found himself.

"Can't you tell us what happened? Sometimes talking about it helps?" Charles tried.

Orion shook his head. "No. Not yet." He thought for a moment and then said bitterly, "One thing that the future version of Dumbledore told me, which holds very true at the moment, is that there are some wounds that go too deep to heal. I am working on it; just give me some more time."

With that, he disappeared up the stairs, leaving Charles and Emma to stare sadly after him, wishing that they could help, yet not able to if he didn't open up to them. Finally, Charles got up and placed extra-strength Unbreakable charms on everything in the house. He would rather not have to repair old, priceless antiques if the dinner didn't go well. With that complete, and with nothing else to do, he and Emma went to bed. Just before he did, however, he decided to check on Orion. He popped his head into Orion's room, expecting to see the younger wizard peacefully asleep. What he saw shocked him.

Orion was clearly caught in a nightmare, and the fact that he had strong silencing charms up was an indication that he'd had them before. Disabling the silencing charms, Charles' heart skipped a beat as Orion screamed out "DAD!!" before his voice dropped and took on a more menacing tone as he hissed, "Dumbledore."

Charles just watched, rooted to the floor as Orion slumped into unconsciousness once more, the nightmare seeming to have gone. Hesitantly, unsure if his grandson would wake, Charles moved over the bed and gently ran a hand through Orion's hair. The touch seemed to soothe the younger wizard, so Charles kept it up until he was sure that Orion was deeply asleep.

Going to his own room, Charles shook his head as he pondered the ever-increasing mystery that surrounded his grandson. Closing his eyes, he wished once more that he could help Orion, but he knew that Orion had to want the help first. Sighing, he slid into a dreamless

sleep.

In his own room, Orion smiled softly and rolled over, the nightmare all but forgotten, the only memory left from the experience being the soothing touch of his grandfather.

Chapter Seventeen: A Secret Revealed

On the first day of classes at Hogwarts, the first-year Gryffindors made their way to the dungeons for Potions with the first-year Slytherins. Severus was promptly cornered by James, Remus and Sirius, all of whom wanted to know what it was like down in the dungeons. Lily was also interested but she was with her dorm-mates, who didn't want to stand near the boys.

"It's alright guys. Malfoy isn't harassing me at all, not after one of the prefects told him off. What's it like up in Gryffindor?" Severus asked, ignoring the muttering from the other Slytherins at him having a friendly conversation with Gryffindors.

"Fun," James said enthusiastically. "The color scheme is a bit bright but everyone's pretty friendly. The seniors don't pay us too much attention, but Professor McGonagall's a good Head of House. What's Slughorn like?"

"Too focused on the seniors to pay much attention to the juniors," Severus grumbled.

Just then the door swung open and the chattering died down as the class entered. All Severus' worries about the year ahead seemed to melt away as he entered the lab. He and Remus promptly claimed a work station to themselves while James and Sirius claimed one right behind them. Lily and another Gryffindor first-year girl had claimed a station next to Severus and Remus.

The murmuring caused by the fact that Severus and Remus had chosen to work together was silenced when Horace Slughorn entered the room. The man gave them a lecture on basic potions and set them to making a cure for boils. Remus wrote the steps down, and then quietly took instructions from Severus on how to prepare the ingredients while trying to block out the whispered argument that James and Sirius were having behind them.

Severus turned round when he felt a tug on his robes.

"What!" he hissed.

James rolled his eyes. "Do we add the porcupine quills before or after we take the cauldron off the fire?"

"Afterwards, otherwise they'll explode," Severus replied and turned back to his own work. The next thing he heard was a loud hissing noise.

"Everyone get up on your chairs," Slughorn barked as he came to investigate the source of the hissing. Turning round, Severus and Remus were met with the sight of James' cauldron melting all over the floor as hot potion splashed everywhere.

"Someone needs to teach him to follow instructions," Severus muttered, missing the hurt look that James sent him. Severus had improved a lot in the art of potions over the last two years of attending the potions camp but because he had improved so much, he didn't tolerate other people's mistakes very well. It was a habit that Orion was doing his best to help Severus overcome, and to his credit, Severus was trying to curb his comments on other people's non-understanding of his favorite subject. Orion's conclusion was that it would just take time, and the added maturity that came with growing up, but he was convinced that Severus would be able to accomplish it.

After Potions came Transfiguration and James and Severus now understood why Orion had refused to teach them the Animagus transformation. Transfiguration seemed highly complicated, and none of the five had managed to make any change to their matches by the end of the lesson even though James swore his had turned a little bit pointy at one end. Professor McGonagall had reassured them that almost no-one made any change in the first lesson and told

them to keep trying. Lily seemed almost as frustrated as James was, as she wasn't used to failing something.

Lunch came next and Severus reluctantly went to the Slytherin table while James, Lily, Sirius and Remus headed for the Gryffindor table. The Slytherins were discussing their classes and the older years were offering their opinions on how to manage it. It was advice that the junior students soaked up eagerly. All of them were feeling a little overwhelmed, it was only the first day and there seemed to be so much to learn.

The rest of the day passed in a blur of classes, with Charms being the most interesting one. The Marauders liked Flitwick and Lily cheered up when she discovered that she was better in Charms than Transfiguration. Defence Against the Dark Arts however, was a different story. When the Marauders walked into the room, Remus stiffened.

Professor Garber looked up and spotted them immediately. His lip curled into a sneer as he saw Remus, but he didn't say anything as the other students took their seats. The lesson passed fairly peacefully with an introduction to the course and then a demonstration of a few basic spells. All throughout the lesson though, the Marauders couldn't help but notice that Garber seemed to dislike Remus, given the way that the professor ignored him when he had an answer, or flat out insulted him.

"What was up with Professor Garber?" James asked as they walked out the door after the lesson was over.

Remus shrugged. "Before my Hogwarts letter even arrived, Dad and I came here to discuss what would happen with my, er, illness. Professor Garber recognized the nature of my condition and was a bit nasty about it. Dad slammed him into the wall and told him exactly what he thought of his opinions. That's why the professor doesn't like me."

"But that was three years ago so he should have gotten over it by now," James said, confused.

Remus shook his head. "Unfortunately, James, people like me aren't exactly regarded well in society. You know that. It's not a surprise that Professor Garber wouldn't be very nice towards me. As long as he doesn't mark me down in tests or be too biased, I can deal with it."

By an unspoken agreement, the group headed for the library to begin their homework. Although it was only the first day, there were a few essays to start, and readings to do. They worked until half an hour before dinner, at which time they packed up their belongings and headed back to their houses to put them away before going to the Great Hall for dinner.

After dinner, Remus and Severus met up in the owlery in order to send letters to Orion. They felt a bit silly sending a letter on the first day but they wanted to let him know how the sorting had gone and what they thought of their classes so far.

"How was your day?" Remus asked as he saw Severus tying his letter to his owl's leg. Severus turned round to see who had come up behind him and smiled when he saw it was Remus.

"Pretty good. All that stuff that looks so easy when Dad does it really isn't though," he replied, checking to see that the knot was tight. Remus busied himself with tying his own letter to his owl and then commented, "I suppose so but then, Dad did say that it gets easier with practice. There's one class that none of us will fail though."

"And what's that?" Severus asked with a smirk.

"Potions of course. We've got you to help us," Remus replied with a matching smirk. "I'd better get back; James and Sirius want to discuss a new prank they've thought up."

Severus couldn't quite keep his tone casual as he asked, "Am I not included in the Marauders anymore?"

Remus spun round, having been almost to the stairs. "Of course you are, but this prank will be against the Slytherins, as we want to get Malfoy, and you need to have, what did Lily call it? – plausible deniability, that's it."

"Plausible deniability? What's that?" Severus asked, interested.

Remus looked a bit embarrassed. "It's when you can say that you had nothing to do with whatever happens, even though people might think you knew about it beforehand."

"Oh," was all Severus said. He thought about the reasoning for a minute and then grinned. "The next prank I'm in on though. Try for one of the teachers."

"Or the Headmaster," Remus agreed.

Chuckling, the two boys left the owlery, splitting up and going back to their houses as it was almost curfew and it wouldn't be very good to be caught outside their common rooms after curfew had started. They did not want to start off the year with a detention.

At Potter Manor, Charles, Emma and Orion were enjoying their own dinner with Dumbledore as their guest. Charles and Emma were busy eating while watching the verbal fencing match between Dumbledore and Orion, and they were slowly beginning to see what Orion had meant when he said that Dumbledore was being manipulative.

"..Orion, I don't quite understand why you refuse to talk to me about your past?" Dumbledore remarked, his tone making it seem like an innocent question when it was anything but.

Orion had kept his expression neutral for most of the meal, but now he allowed a spark of annoyance to linger in his gaze. "Headmaster, with all due respect, hounding me for answers will do you no good. I have told you all you need to know and I'm not ready, or willing, to tell you any more."

"I did apologise for my future self's actions if you'll recall," Dumbledore said, trying to play the guilt card. Recognizing it for what it was, Orion steeled himself and replied coldly, "You did, yes, but your behavior since then has been an almost exact replica of his. Now, whether you're doing it deliberately or not, I must ask that you stop it."

"Stop what?" Dumbledore asked, widening his eyes slightly.

"Stop trying to manipulate me into following you like some blasted pet dog," Orion snapped. One of the china plates on the mantelpiece wobbled ominously and Charles laid a hand on Orion's right forearm, not surprised to find the muscles tense and hard, but very surprised to feel a slight heat around the inner forearm.

Orion felt the contact and breathed out slowly, pulling his emotions under control again. In a tight voice he said, "Please, just leave it alone. We have made progress on the Voldemort issue, but my personal difficulties with you will be harder to sort out."

"Does it have anything to do with the patch on your forearm that's covered by a Glamour spell?" Dumbledore asked, reaching forward to lightly trace the area.

Orion pulled his arm back. "No," he said. "That's just a small patch of disfigured skin that I choose to keep hidden as it's quite distinctive."

"It wouldn't have any connection to Voldemort, would it?" Dumbledore enquired as his eyes hardened.

As the implications of his question sank in, the three Potters were shocked. Emma gasped and then glared at Dumbledore while saying heatedly that Orion would never join Voldemort. Charles also glared at the Headmaster and reiterated his wife's statement before turning to Orion to see what his reaction was.

A sense of raw power filled the room until the air was almost chokingly thick with it as Orion slowly stood, his aura becoming visible in tightly controlled waves of pure magic. In a venomous tone he hissed, "I find your question both insulting and unnecessary. I would never join the wizard who is directly responsible for my parents' deaths, nor would he accept me as a Death Eater after the mess I and my friends made of his lower level minions today. Either you cease such unfounded accusations or you'll find out what it's like to fly out the front door without the help of a broom!"

As he sat down, Orion pulled his magic back under control once more, the power disappearing inside him and quieting down. Charles and Emma hid their shock well; they'd known that their grandson was powerful, but not how powerful. Dumbledore however, was not able to hide his emotions quickly enough. Orion caught the calculating look and snapped, "Thirdly, Headmaster, the Dark Mark is worn on the left inner forearm, not the right so I'm not a Death Eater."

Shaken from the experience, Dumbledore nonetheless showed his own power. In a commanding voice, he said, "Veritas revealomaximus."

Orion winced as he felt all his glamours being ripped off him. He barely heard Charles demanding that Dumbledore leave the Manor as he fell off his chair and curled up in a fetal position, trying desperately to breathe through the pain.

When it had finished, he found that he no longer looked like Orion any longer. His eyes had changed back to their Killing Curse green,

his hair had grown shorter and messier, and the glamour spells on his forearm and the back of his right hand had gone.

Breathing heavily he raised his head and glared at Dumbledore while allowing Charles to help him to his feet.

"What was that?" he rasped, trying to reapply the glamour to his forearm before his second major secret was revealed. Dumbledore noticed his attempts and grabbed his wrist, holding it firmly and pulling on it to extend Orion's right arm.

"Let him go," Charles growled, aiming his wand directly between the Headmaster's eyes. In his true form, Harry was definitely a Potter and Charles would not allow Dumbledore to hurt his grandson any more than he had already.

Dumbledore looked smug as he answered Orion's question. "It was the standard revealing spell but the maximus part means that it will remove any glamour spells that a wizard or witch may be using, no matter what language they're cast in, and no matter how strongly they're anchored."

"And why did you feel it necessary to come into my home and attack a member of my family?" Charles all but snarled as Emma hugged Orion tightly.

"I had to make sure he wasn't a Death Eater in disguise, Charles. I must say, the truth is even more surprising. He's definitely a member of your family; the resemblance to James is quite remarkable. Who is he really, a future relative of James'?"

Charles and Emma looked at Orion who stared back at them. The hint of fear in the green eyes made Emma want to hug him even more tightly than she already was, even though she could sense that her grandson was also absolutely furious, as evidenced by the tenseness of his body and the unconscious growling noise that was

emanating from him.

"Try future son," Orion growled, and then had to choke back a snort of laughter at the gobsmacked look on Dumbledore's face.

"That doesn't explain this though," Dumbledore said, turning Orion's arm so his inner forearm was completely exposed. The two elder Potters leaned closer for a better look. There, in sharp contrast to the rest of Orion's skin, rested a slightly larger than average tattoo. It was in the shape of a phoenix, with a snake clutched between its talons. The phoenix was red and gold, while the snake was black.

"What is it?" Dumbledore asked.

"I'm not telling you!" Orion snarled, twisting his wrist sharply and getting Dumbledore to let go.

Dumbledore's eyes hardened. "I demand to know. That's not the Dark Mark so what is it? Is it the mark of some new Lord who's intending to challenge Voldemort?"

Orion had reached his breaking point. Items flew around him in a whirlwind as he glared at Dumbledore. He felt a firm pressure against his Occlumency shields and snarled, "Stay out of my mind!"

"ENOUGH!!"

Dumbledore and Orion turned to face a furious Charles Potter. Dumbledore seemed unfazed by the fury rolling off his host but Orion was not. He eyed Charles carefully, not afraid, but possessing a healthy respect for the amount of power that his grandfather was capable of using. It was similar to his own, Orion mused, but at the same time different.

"Orion, sit down," Charles said, trying to speak calmly, but his tone still had an angry edge to it. Orion promptly sat on the nearest chair,

feeling Emma's arm go round his shoulders once more. Charles was exercising his full authority as Head of the Potter family, meaning that he had the ability, should he so choose, to compel obedience from his family members, which included Orion. As he sat next to Emma, Orion watched as Charles let loose with a verbal tirade that made Dumbledore visibly wilt and back down. When he'd finished, Charles said more calmly, "Orion, do you have anything else to say before we show our guest out?"

Orion growled as he stood up again. "Yes. I want an Unbreakable Vow from him that he won't reveal anything about my true identity to anyone. I want to ensure that he won't be able to write, speak or share any memories of my true identity at all. I also want him to swear that he won't harm any member of the Potter family, whether adopted or not, either now or in the future."

"Do you know what you're asking?" Charles asked carefully.

Orion turned a cold look on him. "Yes I do. I will accept nothing less from him; he's already proven that we can't trust him. I will not let you or our respective children be hurt in his quest to control me."

Charles nodded and then glared at Dumbledore. "You heard him Dumbledore. Before you leave, you will swear an Unbreakable Vow to Harry with me as the witness."

Dumbledore looked around but realized that he was trapped. Charles had raised the Manor wards, ensuring that his now unwelcome guest couldn't leave until he allowed it. This left Dumbledore with little choice but to accept the terms.

"Fine, I accept," he said, recognizing when he was beaten.

Orion and Charles nodded in unison, their faces set in cold, grim expressions. Orion was furious that Dumbledore had revealed the secret that he'd held onto for so long. The Mark, as he thought of it,

and the circumstances surrounding it, was the one thing he hadn't told his grandparents when he'd first met them. He couldn't tell them, it was too painful, too shameful, to talk about. Now he'd have to tell them, he could see by the small glances that Emma kept throwing his way, and the assessing look in Charles' eyes that he wouldn't be able to get away with not telling them.

The Unbreakable Vow was soon done and Dumbledore left, with Orion making good on his promise of showing Dumbledore what it was like to fly without a broom. The elderly wizard had, with the help of both Orion and Charles' strongest Banishing spells, flown down the hallway and through the front door, landing hard on his backside in the front garden. As he got up and painfully began to limp outside the wards so he could Apparate, Charles went outside.

"Dumbledore," he said coolly. As the ancient wizard turned to face him, Charles growled, "You have just earned the enmity of the entire Potter family. We will never follow you, nor will any of our descendants. We recognize that we have to work with you in order to get rid of Voldemort but our association goes no further than that."

Dumbledore nodded shakily. Charles smiled in a wolfish manner before his voice dropped to a much more menacing tone. "Also," he said, "if you ever harm any member of my family again, then I will see you in Azkaban for the rest of your life. Do you understand?"

Again Dumbledore nodded and Charles stepped back, satisfied. "Leave," he said, and Dumbledore wasted no time limping to the edge of the wards and then Apparating away.

Charles made his way back inside and surveyed the ruins of the dining room. With a small sigh he drew his wand and flicked it, cleaning and repairing everything before following the sound of muted voices to the living room, where he discovered Orion clinging to Emma as though he'd die if he let her go. Without a word, Charles sat down on Orion's other side and joined in the hug, sandwiching

the young wizard and staying there until Orion had calmed down.

"Now," Charles said when Orion seemed to finally be ready to talk,
"mind telling us what that mark is all about?"

Chapter Eighteen: Explanations, Death Eaters and Pranks

"Mind telling us what that mark is all about?"

Orion sighed and dropped his head into his hands. His voice was slightly muffled when he replied, "OK. I'll need to collect something from home first though." His grandparents let him go and he Flooed back to Marauder Manor, where he entered his study and took down his Pensieve. He hesitated a moment, and then hissed a command in parseltongue. A previously unseen portrait activated and swung open, revealing the safe behind it. Another hissed command and the safe swung open. Reaching inside, Orion felt his heart clench as he took out the contents – a solid silver collar, with runes etched into the outside. Carrying both items to the fireplace he Flooed back to Potter Manor.

When he re-entered the living room, Charles and Emma were startled to see that he still looked like Harry, rather than Orion. Catching their enquiring glances, Orion set the pensieve and the collar down on the table and sat down beside Emma, needing her presence, as well as Charles' in order to tell the story.

"It doesn't feel right telling you this part of my story while I look like Orion," he explained, relieved when his grandparents nodded in understanding.

"Where do I start?" Orion asked. He really wasn't sure how to go about beginning this tale, it was painful and one that he really didn't want to tell. Charles rubbed his back while Emma wrapped her arms round him, telling him non-verbally that they were there, and would support him. Bolstered by this, Orion took a breath and began talking.

"It starts, I suppose, halfway through my fifth year. Dumbledore," he couldn't quite keep the snarl out of his tone, "had decided that I had to learn Occlumency, and that the only one available to teach me

was Severus, or, as I knew him, Professor Snape. The problem with that was that we hated each other, or at least strongly disliked each other."

"And learning something like Occlumency would be nearly impossible if there isn't trust between the teacher and the student," Charles commented.

Orion nodded and continued. "Yes. Anyway, halfway through the lessons, he leaves his Pensieve out on the desk. He'd been poking through my most painful and humiliating memories for months, and I was an angry, frustrated teenager who was upset about being told nothing about Voldemort's latest plot to kill me, even though I could have done with the information. So, I kind of took a look inside."

"Harry! A Pensieve can hold a person's most private memories; they're not to be entered without permission. How could you!" Charles scolded, shocked at this admission.

Orion shrugged. "It's no excuse I know but, no one had ever told me about the rules regarding Pensieves, not Dumbledore, not Hermione, not anyone. And although I was trying my best to learn Occlumency, it didn't seem to be working and I was angry that Professor Snape seemed to have carte blanche to go digging around in my memories and I couldn't do a thing to stop it. So, in I went."

"And," Emma asked.

Orion looked sick. "I landed in a memory of the Marauders' fifth year. It was just after their DADA OWL exam. The Marauders, who consisted of James, Sirius, Remus, and Peter Pettigrew, were underneath a tree, talking about the exam when Severus went too close to them. They weren't friends, they were enemies."

"What happened next?" Charles prompted.

Orion looked sideways at him. "I witnessed my father hanging Severus upside down in front of a lot of the students and then threatening to take off his trousers, all because Sirius was bored and wanted some entertainment."

Charles closed his eyes. "I see. So, you learnt, in effect that your father wasn't as perfect as you'd always thought he was."

Orion looked ashamed. "I realize that as you grow up, you learn that your parents aren't perfect but that's not the point. The point is that, at that moment, I couldn't see a lot of difference between the Marauders and my cousin and his gang, apart from the fact that the Marauders were magical. I also realized then that Severus had every reason to hate my father and by extension, me."

"Whatever James did to him in your future, Harry, that was no excuse for his treatment of you," Charles said quietly and firmly. "And with Severus now being part of the Marauders, this event won't happen, so please, continue. I assume he caught you?"

Orion grinned sheepishly. "Yes. He was furious, as he had every right to be, but I think he was taken aback when I staggered over to the rubbish bin and threw up everything I'd eaten that day. When I'd finished throwing up, he handed me a stomach settling potion and then asked why I'd thrown up. It was...amusing...to see the look on his face when I explained that the reason I'd thrown up was because I couldn't stand the fact that my father had been such a bully. He didn't quite know what to make of the fact that I wasn't enjoying his humiliation, that I was, in fact, physically sickened by it."

"And did his opinion of you change after that?" Emma enquired.

Orion leaned into her embrace and closed his eyes. "He started to change his opinion. He gave me several detentions for my actions, which I didn't complain about, but the fact that I allowed him access to my most embarrassing memories at that time helped him to see

that our childhoods weren't that dissimilar, and that I did understand at least a little of what he'd gone through. That was when he started to think that perhaps his ideas about me being a miniature version of James were wrong."

He took a few breaths, reordering his thoughts, and then said, "Our opinions of each other slowly changed over my sixth year, although he didn't truly become a mentor to me until halfway through the first term of my seventh year."

"So what does this have to do with that mark and the collar?" Charles asked.

Orion smiled. "I was giving you background on why my relationship with Sev changed, otherwise you wouldn't understand the significance of the later events. I should also mention that I became friends with Draco Malfoy, Lucius Malfoy's future son, during the latter half of sixth year as well."

He fell silent, contemplating the collar with dark, hooded eyes. He tensed when Emma picked it up, frowning as she looked at the runes. "I can't read these Orion, what do they mean?" she asked.

Orion took it from her and turned it over. "They mean," he replied quietly, "bind eighty percent of magic. This collar restricted eighty percent of my magic from the time I was five years old to the time I was seventeen and found out about it. I'm getting ahead of the story though."

Taking another breath, he closed his eyes, and began.

"Halfway through the second term of my seventh year, I broke up with Ginny Weasley, Ron's sister, because I found out that she was only after me for my money. Then I discovered a couple of days later that she'd been drugging me with the Amortentia love potion since the beginning of the previous year. I'd only got together with her

halfway through my sixth year, which, as Severus told me, proved that I was extremely strong-willed. Well, that's what he meant anyway. What he actually said was that it proved that I was what he'd always thought I was."

"And what was that?" Charles asked.

"A stubborn, hard-headed little brat," Orion said with a grin.

"Did you mind that?" Emma asked.

Orion chuckled. "No. By that stage I'd learnt when he was teasing and when he wasn't. The words might have sounded derogatory but he was teasing me, not belittling me. Anyway, to get back at me for exposing her little scheme, she and Ron decided to humiliate me in front of the entire school. Ron vanished my clothes, leaving me stark naked, and Ginny then used that revealing spell which stripped off all the glamour spells I was wearing."

"Glamour spells?" Charles asked.

Orion smiled bitterly.

"My relatives left me with rather a lot of scars that I wanted to keep hidden. I discovered the incantation for the standard glamour spell in my first year and practiced until I could keep it up with no problem. I'd worn glamour spells since then. Ron knew about them because I wasn't quite discreet enough and he discovered what I was hiding."

"So what happened?" Emma asked.

"Draco offered me a robe to cover myself up until I got to the hospital wing. When I got there, Madam Pomfrey discovered two more glamour spells that Dumbledore had cast on me. The revealing spell had not broken those because Dumbledore was too powerful for the standard revealing spell to break his spells. When Dumbledore took

them off, it showed the collar and the mark on my arm."

He fell silent, and seemed to be thinking of something. Finally he shrugged. "The collar was to bind my magic so I would be average, and not too powerful for Dumbledore to control. The mark was to ensure my loyalty to him. When I told him that I wasn't his pet and that he could go fuck himself if he thought that I ever would be I discovered the other function of the collar, which was that it could choke me into submission. Professor Snape and Professor McGonagall were furious with him and demanded that he let me go or they would go to the school board of governors. Dumbledore let me go but he didn't remove the collar, claiming that the magical backlash would kill me. I had other plans though."

He took a sip of water and continued. "We'd brewed the Heritage potion in Potions class the previous week and I'd discovered that I was the Heir of Gryffindor and the Heir of Slytherin. I cut my palm with a small knife and placed it on the wall, before calling to Hogwarts for help removing the collar. The castle very obligingly helped, and instead of killing me, all that pent up magic that had been held back from me for so long helped wash away the Dursley's treatment of me, as well as fixing my eyesight and helping me grow to my proper height of somewhere around six feet. The rest of the magic had to go somewhere so I channeled it and all the anger and hurt I was feeling into a powerful Legilimens spell, directed at Dumbledore."

Orion shuddered as he remembered what came next, and Charles hugged him a bit tighter. Both elder Potters were furious with the future Dumbledore and they were also feeling a bit guilty at the fact that they'd urged Orion to make peace with Dumbledore in this time, when he clearly had good reason to hate the old wizard.

"What happened next?" Emma prodded.

"I went through his shields as if they weren't there," Orion said bleakly, "and I discovered that he'd collared and marked me when I

was five years old. Only five! Then, I went looking for related memories, and I discovered that he'd been responsible for everything going wrong with my life. He killed the two of you when James was only sixteen, and made it look like Death Eaters had done it. Then, after I was born, and Mum and Dad went into hiding, he knew that Sirius wasn't the Secret Keeper and still let him go to Azkaban without a trial. He was free after that to place me with the people that Mum and Dad specifically stated I was NOT to go to. To make it clear how much they didn't want me going there, they stated that they preferred me being raised by Dark wizards as opposed to the Dursleys."

"So let me get this straight. Dumbledore killed us during James' sixth year, made it look like Death Eaters did it, then sat back and let Sirius go to Azkaban for a crime he didn't commit, left you with relatives that your parents specifically stated you shouldn't go to, and then, when you were five years old, collared and marked you like some sort of pet animal all to ensure that you were loyal and subservient to him so that if Voldemort returns, he had a loyal little pawn to fight him," Charles summed up, disgusted.

"Yes," Orion stated flatly. "After I removed the collar, with Professors McGonagall and Snape protecting me, Dumbledore decided to show me that I was still under his control. The mark was his version of Voldemort's Dark Mark, and it burnt like hell. I transfigured a nearby towel into a knife and tried carving it out of my arm. Professor Snape stopped me, telling me that it wouldn't come off that way. Madam Pomfrey then healed me but it left a scar anyway."

Emma gently rubbed the half-circle scar around the top of the mark on Orion's arm, comforting him. He smiled at her and said, "Over the rest of the year I tried everything to get rid of it. When magic didn't work, I tried Muggle laser surgery. It kept coming back. I was finally forced to confront the truth that I would never be free of it, that I would always wear it. That knowledge hurts, even now. I think I've got good reason to hate Dumbledore, don't you?"

"What about Sirius and Remus?" Charles asked. "Surely they would have helped you?"

Orion shook his head. "They would have, if Dumbledore hadn't sent them on a mission that he knew they wouldn't come back from. I received notice of their deaths a week after this all happened. That almost broke me. It took Professor Snape and Professor McGonagall stepping in and taking a more familial role with me in order for me to keep going. That and Hogwarts helping me out once again."

"What do you mean?" Emma enquired.

"The Room of Requirement is a truly wonderful thing. I desperately needed to talk to my parents, to talk to Sirius and Remus, and the room came through for me, providing echoes of them, which, while they weren't truly real, they were real enough to help me when I needed it. Hearing that they were proud of me and that I had indeed achieved everything they could have wanted from me went a long way to healing the wounds that Dumbledore had caused, although it still took me several months to come to terms with everything that I'd discovered. When I exited the room, I was still angry with Dumbledore, but I had changed. I was now able to finally become who I had to be in order to kill Voldemort and live my life."

"So what happened then?"

"Then," Orion said, "my grades picked up, I found the classes easier, and more interesting now that I had all my magic available to me. Also, Professor Snape began training me intensively in Potions and Defence against the Dark Arts in order to help me defeat Voldemort. He also, although he wasn't supposed to, taught me more than a few of the Dark Arts, including the Unforgivables. All I had to focus on when I cast the Unforgivables was Dumbledore. That gave me all the hate I needed to cast them. He also showed me a spell that, when used, shows a possible future based on changing one event. The

event I chose was Dumbledore not killing you but leaving everything else the same. The result was that Mum and Dad died, Sirius went to Azkaban, but I was raised by you, and grew up with a loving family."

"That must have been painful, seeing what you missed out on," Charles commented.

Orion smirked at him. "Yes, it was. Although, the downside of the spell was that it showed the bad as well as the good."

"In other words, it showed you our reactions to some of your more, ahem, questionable activities," Emma snorted, laughing at the thought.

Orion chuckled as well. "Yes. At the end of the year, I graduated and was immediately recruited into the Unspeakables. They took me and gave me more training so that when all Voldemort's Horcruxes were finally gone, I was able to kill him."

There was silence for a long while after Orion finished his story, and then Charles said, "Harry, if we ever ask you to forgive Dumbledore again, please feel free to knock some sense into us."

Orion chuckled and hugged his grandparents tightly. "Now you know why I insisted on that Vow including no harm coming to any of my family, not just me. I have to work with him; I don't have to like him, or trust him, or view him with anything other than suspicious tolerance."

"True," Emma said, hugging him back just as tightly.

Orion smiled and sat back, feeling freer than he had in a long time. He chuckled as a thought occurred to him.

"What's so funny?" Charles asked.

"Oh nothing. Just remembering a conversation I had with Professor

Snape when he mentioned that if it had been possible to do so, he would have taken me in and raised me."

"Oh?" Charles said, raising an eyebrow.

Orion shook his head and put the memory in his Pensieve before inviting his grandparents to see it.

Harry was in the Room of Requirement with Professor Snape, having just finished a training session.

"Acceptable, Potter. Soon you'll get to the point where you can beat me but you're not there just yet," Snape said coolly.

Harry grinned at him. "Soon meaning tomorrow?" he asked.

Snape snorted. "Cheeky brat. Have you cast that spell I showed you?"

"The one which shows the future? Yes I have," Harry replied, his good mood evaporating. "It was good, but also reminded me of what Dumbledore took from me."

He looked up at his mentor before saying seriously, "Although, you and Professor McGonagall have stepped in to fill those places quite well over the past few months. I don't think I've ever thanked you properly for that."

Snape looked uncomfortable. "You don't have to thank us Harry, we would do it for anyone. I should tell you, I suppose, that when Dumbledore left you on your relatives' doorstep all those years ago, that Minerva came to me afterwards and raged for a good hour or so about his actions, and whether it was possible to kidnap you and raise you herself."

"Would she have done?" Harry asked, his eyes wide.

Snape shrugged and sat down in a chair that appeared just behind him. Harry sat down opposite him in another chair. "She was ready to go and do it until I pointed out that you needed a male role model too. She looked at me and suggested, well, what if we raised you together. I will admit that I gave serious thought to her suggestion."

"You would have taken me in? Even after what my father did to you?" Harry couldn't believe his ears.

"At the time, you were a helpless baby who'd just lost his family. No matter my feelings about your father, I would have taken you in," Snape confirmed, watching with amusement as Harry gaped at him.

"I'd have been a lot better at Potions," he mused finally. "And no one would have dared treat me like Ron and Ginny did."

"What about the downside of having teachers for parents?" Snape asked, wondering what would happen when Harry figured out the downside to the hypothetical situation.

"What downside?" Harry asked, confused.

"The downside that if you got into trouble, we'd know about it a lot quicker than most other parents, plus we could do a lot more about it than just send a Howler," Snape replied, watching with great amusement as Harry's eyes widened in shock and then his face fell.

"Bloody hell, you'd have killed me over the flying car," he muttered.

"Not to mention the troll, illegally making Polyjuice potion, the Chamber of Secrets, the hippogriff, sneaking out of school to visit Hogsmeade without permission, the Triwizard Tournament, the stuff you pulled with Umbridge and the DA," Snape listed.

"Oy! The Triwizard Tournament wasn't my fault and Umbridge

persecuted me a lot more than you ever did. And how did you know about the Polyjuice?" Harry grumbled.

"I'm a Potions Master; Madam Pomfrey called me in to see if I knew how to reverse what you three did. It was extremely dangerous, not to mention illegal, and if I'd been your guardian then you'd have been very sorry that you'd done it. I also notice that you haven't denied the other escapades," Snape pointed out, smirking when Harry reluctantly shook his head.

"I suppose that's why you've protected me all these years?" Harry asked.

Snape squeezed his shoulder firmly yet gently. "In a way, yes, I suppose I did feel responsible for you. But also, I made a promise to your mother that I would protect you as much as I could. She would have hated my treatment of you in previous years, Harry, but she wouldn't have been entirely pleased with your conduct towards me either. Still, that's in the past now."

Harry nodded and then on impulse he got up and wrapped his arms round the startled Potions Master. After a few seconds, he felt Snape wrap his arms round him as well and they stayed like that until Snape pushed him away, growling, "You're making me entirely too sentimental, brat. Let's get back to ways of defeating my former Master."

Charles and Emma exited the Pensieve, laughing. "Your face when you realized the downside of having parents at school," Charles said, almost falling off his chair.

"Not to mention the impressive list of escapades," Emma added, giggling madly. Both of them took one look at Orion's offended expression before breaking down in laughter once again.

"Are you going to show that memory to the Marauders when you

reveal the truth?" Emma finally asked.

Orion nodded. "Yes. Sev will want to know what our relationship ended up like and it should provide some amusement."

Charles and Emma couldn't disagree with that, and they quietly chuckled at the thought of Severus finding out what the exact nature of his relationship with Orion had been.

"So, do you have any plans for tonight?" Charles asked casually. Orion nodded. "Yes, we're hunting down a few Death Eaters tonight. We're going after a few of the high ranking inner circle so it should be fun."

"I still don't approve of you thinking that hunting Death Eaters is fun, Orion," Charles said reprovingly.

Orion shrugged. "It's my job Charles, what else can I do. Plus, the less Death Eaters that are out there, the less people get hurt. Also, I'm going to pick up the diadem Horcrux after getting rid of the merry morons."

"I suppose we can't really stop you. Just promise us that you'll be careful," Emma pleaded.

Orion nodded reluctantly. "I'm always careful, but yes, I promise," he said sincerely. Emma nodded and hugged him, followed by Charles.

That night, Orion and his team were involved in a heavy battle against five high-ranking and seven lower-level Death Eaters. The Death Eaters had attacked a family of Muggles, only to find a team of Aurors, accompanied by the Wolves, defending the family.

The Aurors took on the lower level Death Eaters, leaving the Wolves to take the higher ranking ones. Mad-Eye Moody was leading the

Aurors and Orion was impressed to see one of his former trainers in action. The man might still be paranoid, but he was a good fighter.

The respect went both ways, even though Moody didn't know who he really was. At one point during the battle, Orion found himself back-to-back with the senior Auror as they fought their respective opponents.

"Nice move!" Moody growled as Orion sliced his opponent's arm off with a cutting curse. Orion smirked and replied, "You're not that bad yourself," as Moody bound and gagged his opponent before sending him to the Ministry.

Moody just grunted in reply and moved away to engage another Death Eater, leaving Orion to check how his team was doing. Finding that his team had taken down all of their opponents and were now busy checking them for any concealed Portkeys or other hidden magical items, Orion quickly dispatched his opponent, unfortunately killing him when the magical ropes he sent at the Death Eater wrapped round his throat instead of his torso.

"Uh, oops," he said when his team stared at him. Kestrel and Diamond shook their heads, while Reaper just chuckled.

"I thought you said we should take them alive Hunter," he said in an amused tone.

Orion shrugged. "Mistakes happen, and besides," he bent down and removed the dead Death Eater's mask, "I recognize this guy. He's the main coordinator for the majority of Death Eater attacks lately. With him dead, Voldemort will have to choose someone else to be his main coordinator and he'll take a while deciding who he wants to trust."

His team looked at each other, and then at him before shrugging and checking their captives once more. "What do you want us to do with

these?" Kestrel asked.

Orion looked over at Moody who was talking with the remains of his team. Four Aurors had died and the rest were looking more than a little battered. Looking at his own team, Orion winced when he saw that they looked almost as battered as the Aurors. The fact that most of the Death Eaters had been captured or killed meant that the Aurors and Unspeakables had won the battle, but it didn't really feel like a victory.

"Let's drop the rubbish off at the Ministry and then go home and recover," Orion said in a tired voice. Dueling was always a combination of adrenaline and exhilaration, a different sort of thrill to flying, but a thrill nonetheless. It wasn't the opponents that got him keyed up, it was the fight itself, the chance to match himself against an opponent and see who was better. Shaking himself out of his thoughts, Orion saw Moody approaching him as the rest of the Wolves Portkeyed to the Ministry with the captive Death Eaters.

"Hunter," the Auror called.

Orion turned. "Yes, Auror Moody," he replied.

Moody grinned at him, his missing eye and many scars making him look rather frightening. "Good work tonight. You must have had experience."

"Yes, I have," Orion said flatly, stretching his arms.

Moody eyed him carefully. "Would you be interested in a little tournament?" he asked.

"What sort of tournament?" Orion queried, wary of the offer.

"It's being held in two years. You've heard of the Triwizard Tournament?"

Orion nodded. "Yes. Don't tell me that it's being held once more."

Moody chuckled. "It's the adult version of the Triwizard Tournament. Look, here's a pretty miserable place to talk so I'll meet you at the Leaky Cauldron tomorrow at six pm if that's OK with you."

Orion did some quick calculations and then smiled. "Perfect. I'll see you then." Moody nodded and Apparated to the Ministry. Orion had a last look around and then followed.

After the debriefing, Orion Apparated to Potter Manor, where he assured his grandparents that he was alive and well. Then he Apparated to Hogsmeade, entered the sweetshop, and took the tunnel to Hogwarts. Opening the statue of the humpback witch at the Hogwarts end, he quietly made himself invisible and silent before closing the statue with a tap of his wand.

Walking quietly up to the Room of Requirement, he was distracted on the third floor when he heard shuffling footsteps. Pressing himself close to the wall, he shook his head in amusement as he clearly heard Remus whisper to James to stop treading on his toes, and Sirius shushing both of them. He couldn't see the three boys so he surmised that they must be under the invisibility cloak.

Reaching out to where he thought they were, he tapped one invisible shoulder. The shuffling stopped abruptly, and the cloak was cautiously pulled off, revealing three floating heads.

Orion smirked and revealed his own head, causing the boys to sigh in relief, before tensing when they realized that they really weren't supposed to be sneaking around after curfew.

"Don't worry boys, I'm not about to rat you out," Orion whispered. "Why are you out here anyway?"

"We're trying to find the Slytherin common room to play a prank on the Slytherins but we can't find it," Sirius admitted.

"And why isn't Severus with you?" Orion asked with a raised eyebrow.

"We didn't want his housemates to think that he helped us in any way," James admitted. "He agreed with the reasoning, but only agreed to be left out of any pranks played on Slytherin house only. Any pranks against everyone, or the teachers, he's part of. He's still our friend and part of the group," Remus insisted.

Orion held up a hand. "OK I get it. Calm down and more importantly, quiet down. Have you thought of making a map so you don't get lost, or asking Severus for directions?"

"Severus said that if he wasn't part of the prank, then he wasn't going to help us with directions," James muttered.

Orion chuckled. "Well, you're lucky that I've got directions. The only thing I ask is that you don't tell him that I helped you."

The three Marauders looked at him in shock, before nodding their heads eagerly. Orion chuckled. "OK." He quickly gave them directions, and then watched as they disappeared back under the cloak and left.

"They're going to have to learn to be quieter," he murmured to himself, before reapplying his invisibility spell and fading out of sight once more. Grinning, he headed for the Room of Requirement. He had a Horcrux to retrieve.

After retrieving the diadem, Orion made his way out of Hogwarts and back to the Ministry. Entering the Department of Mysteries, he headed for the destruction room, where he promptly destroyed the diadem. That done, he headed back to Marauder Manor where he

fell into an uneasy sleep, filled with dreams of tournaments, horcruxes and pranks all intertwined together. After dreaming that Voldemort made a horcrux using a pink, fluffy stag that made loud clucking noises whenever the word Slytherin was uttered, he woke up. Shaking his head at his subconscious and the ridiculous things it sometimes came up with, he rolled over and fell back into a dreamless sleep.

Author Note

Hello everyone. This chapter was really difficult to write so I'm glad it's finally done. I've also been working more on my original series and it now has a name, which I'm very happy about. I'm going to be working on that as well as Erasing History and my other fics that are on my profile. Hope you like this chapter and the next one will be up as soon as I've written it.

May the Force be with you

Padawan Lynne

Chapter Nineteen: Talks, Revelations, and Final Goodbyes

Orion stepped into the Leaky Cauldron at precisely six pm the next evening, quickly sweeping his eyes over the crowded pub, searching for Moody. Finding him in a back corner facing the door, he made his way over and slid into the seat opposite him.

"Who are you?" Moody growled at him.

Raising an eyebrow, Orion responded, "The guy who relieved a Death Eater of an arm last night."

Moody peered at him. "Hunter?" he queried. Orion nodded, and Moody chuckled.

"Good. Had to make sure, you understand." Orion nodded again and Moody relaxed, calling the waiter over and indicating that Orion should order a drink. Once he'd done so and the drink had been delivered, Moody put up a silencing charm, and Orion reinforced it, adding obfuscation and privacy charms for good measure.

"Right, now what's this tournament all about?" Orion asked. He was very curious, having never heard of the adult version of the Tournament that he'd been entered into in his fourth year.

Moody snorted. "Down to business I see. The tournament is the adult version of the Triwizard tournament, held between the same three countries. Each country has preliminary contests to find out the six best candidates, and then the French and German contestants come over here and put their names into the Goblet of Fire, along with the names of our six. Then, the Goblet selects two candidates from each country to compete in the tournament. There are several tasks, the number and exact details of each one will be decided later. The competitor who performs the best wins the tournament."

Moody took a sip of his drink and eyed Orion, smirking. "Interested?"

he enquired.

Orion thought about it. He had to make it through the preliminaries and there was always the chance he wouldn't be selected to compete if he did make it into the final six. Additionally, in two years, hopefully more Horcruxes would have been found and destroyed. It also sounded like fun. Coming to a decision, he met Moody's gaze and nodded.

"Yes. I'm in. What do I have to do?"

His companion laughed. "I knew you'd say yes. What you have to do is enter your name with the clerk in the International Games office in the Ministry within the next three months. The preliminary rounds will take place next year and then the tournament will be the year after."

"Why so long between events?" Orion asked curiously.

Moody shrugged. "Not sure. To give people time to enter I suppose, but then, a lot of organization goes into things like these. I look forward to seeing you in the preliminaries. Don't get killed by Death Eaters in the meantime."

"Don't worry about me, I'll be fine," Orion said. It was his standard response these days when people worried about him going out fighting Voldemort's band of merry morons. He finished his drink and rose, bidding Moody goodbye.

With his mind made up, he Flooed to the Ministry, and made his way to the International Games office to register. He found a queue of wizards and some witches waiting to enter. As he moved forward he saw Abraxus Malfoy and Orion Black ahead of him. Smiling slightly, he allowed himself to indulge in a brief fantasy of beating Abraxus in the Tournament, before shaking his head and refocusing on his reason for being there.

The queue shuffled forward quickly and soon Orion was at the front. He wrote his name on the long list that had already formed, and then headed for the door. As he squeezed out of the office, he heard his name called.

"Abraxus," he replied coolly, hiding his surprise behind a mask of indifference. "I see you entered the preliminaries for this Tournament."

Abraxus nodded and replied equally coolly, "Yes, I did. Are you planning on getting through to the top six?"

Orion shrugged. "There are a lot of contestants, but I think I've got a good chance. You?"

"I believe I've got an equally good chance. I'll see you in the top six then."

Orion nodded and watched as Abraxus walked away. Shaking his head, he decided to go to the Department of Mysteries. Croaker had mentioned a joint mission with another team and he needed to speak to the other team leader, to work out details and what they'd do about sharing command.

Entering the department, he ran into the person he wanted to talk to, quite literally. Getting up off the floor, Orion dusted himself off and held out his hand, helping the other Unspeakable up off the floor.

"If you wanted to see me, Hunter, you didn't have to run me over," the Unspeakable, an attractive witch who went by the name of Eagle, said indignantly.

Orion shrugged. "Pure chance, Eagle, pure chance. I wanted to talk about that joint mission our two teams are being sent on next week."

Eagle narrowed her eyes. "Are you going to pull rank on me? I'm

aware that you're the more experienced one of the two of us."

Orion shook his head. "No. There's no reason we can't work together amicably. I'm not going to order you around; I'm not going to pull rank. I just wanted to see if we can work out some basic plans for how we're going to coordinate our activities."

Eagle gave him a calculating look and then nodded slowly. "OK, Hunter, I'll buy that. Let's go somewhere more private to discuss it though."

Orion nodded and led the way to his office, inviting his fellow team leader to sit down. Unlike most of the offices, Orion had outfitted his for comfort, enlarging the space inside the office with permanent charms and then putting a couple of armchairs in the small lounge area, with a small, square coffee table between them. Further back was his desk with a chair behind it, and one facing it. A bookshelf lined the back wall, and his filing cabinet was off to the side, firmly locked with the strongest possible locking charm, cast in Parseltongue.

Eagle looked round appreciatively from her spot in one of the armchairs as Orion locked and silenced the office before sitting down in the opposite armchair to her. An awkward silence fell.

Coughing uncomfortably, Orion broke the silence by saying, "Well, has Croaker given you any details about the assignment?"

Eagle tilted her head to the side, considering her colleague. Unless she missed her guess, the usually cool and collected Hunter was actually uncomfortable being in his own office, alone, with her. Smiling inwardly, she decided to see if she could get him to relax.

"Not much. Just that it involves Death Eaters and possibly You-Know-Who. Croaker's also worried about a possible mole in the department."

"A mole? He thinks there's a Death Eater within the Unspeakables?" Orion asked, shocked. Eagle nodded grimly.

"Yes. He doesn't know who it is, but when he finds out, it's a safe bet that the Death Eater will be killed very quickly."

"Good," Orion growled. The thought of one of his colleagues working for the other side was sickening. He found himself relaxing around Eagle, being less awkward around her. He didn't know why he felt uncomfortable, she was a colleague, and they were talking about work. Shoving his disquiet away, he sank into work mode, locking Orion away and becoming Hunter.

The details of the joint mission were worked out fairly quickly, and then the two Unspeakables were left staring at each other. Orion quickly unlocked the office and left the door open. Eagle wasted no time in getting to her feet.

"See you next week then, Hunter," she said as she left.

Orion was left standing in his office, watching her leave, and wondering why he felt like he'd just been hit over the head with a Quidditch Beater bat. Resolving not to think about it, he opted to head to Potter Manor for dinner. Maybe Charles or Emma had an answer for him as to his unexpected reaction.

As it turned out they did. Over dinner, when Orion related the details of his reaction to his, admittedly attractive, colleague, Charles and Emma started to chuckle and then laugh when he looked utterly confused.

"Do you really mean to tell me, Orion, that you haven't noticed that she's attractive?" Emma asked between giggles.

Orion looked offended. "Of course I've noticed. I'm not blind. She's a

colleague though, and,"

"And what Orion? There's no rule against colleagues falling in love, or dating, as long as personal concerns are kept away from work."

Orion looked stunned. "We're not in love though. I just need to manage my hormones better," he muttered.

Charles was looking at him calculatingly, while Emma gave him a hug. "Are you afraid to admit your attraction to the lovely Eagle for some reason?" Charles asked slowly.

Orion's head snapped up and his eyes bored into his grandfather's. "I am not afraid," he snapped. "I just,"

"Just what?" Charles pressed. It had been three years since his grandson's arrival in the past, three years since the loss of his wife. It was time, in Charles' opinion, for Orion to get his act together and move on, an opinion which Orion was firmly set on resisting.

"Just, well, I'd feel that I was being disloyal to Hermione," Orion muttered, not looking at Charles. He heard Charles push his chair back and then felt a hand on his shoulder. He looked up into hazel eyes that were so like James' and looked back down again.

"It's been three years, Harry," Charles said, deliberately using his real name, hoping to talk some sense into the younger Potter. "Do you think that Hermione would want you to mourn her for the rest of your life, or would she want you to move on and live?"

Orion sat quietly for a few minutes, allowing Charles' words to sink into his mind. He knew, intellectually, that Charles was right, that he had to move on sometime, but he couldn't help but feel that, in his heart, he was still married. When he said as much, Emma said something that shocked him to his core.

Glaring at him, she said in a tone that he had never heard from her before, "Harry James Potter, grieving a loved one is all well and good but at some point, you have to move on or you'll waste away to nothing! You have a life to live. Stop wallowing in misery and start living it! We're not telling you to find some random witch and marry her, we're telling you that it's time to let go of Hermione. Remember her of course, we'd never tell you to forget her, but the best way to remember her is to treasure her memory, while moving on with your life."

"And what about Voldemort? Is it right to be with someone, when I'm not sure how long I'm going to be here?" Orion demanded.

"What do you mean?" Charles asked calmly, hoping to defuse the tense atmosphere created by Emma's outburst.

Orion ran a hand through his hair, frustrated. "I mean that even if I find all his Horcruxes and destroy him, Fate will find some way to get rid of me. There can't be two Harry Potters in the same place at the same time. Despite my new name and appearance, inside, I am still Harry Potter, still the Chosen One. That means that I have to die or disappear somewhere before July nineteen eighty one."

"So, what, you think you'll kill Voldemort and die along with him?" Emma asked quietly.

"Or that Dumbledore will find some way round that Unbreakable Vow and kill me because of what I've done to him," Orion replied tiredly. "It's just, if I do only have six more years here, I don't want to fall in love again. It would be too painful for the person I left behind."

"You can't let what may happen stop you from living now, Harry," Charles said. "You're attracted to your colleague. If it's meant to go somewhere, it will. Let things happen on their own schedule. No one can know what the future holds, the best we can do is live in the present and hope for the best."

Orion nodded slowly, and rubbed the wedding ring that he still wore, three years after Hermione's death. Swallowing hard, he abruptly pushed his chair back and stood.

"Thanks for the meal. I, I need to go home though," he said, his voice tight and a bit choked up. Charles and Emma nodded, knowing that they'd pressed on a very sensitive emotional nerve and that Orion needed space to deal with it. When he'd gone, they looked at each other and sighed.

"Do you think he'll come round?" Charles asked.

Emma shrugged. "I hope so. I shouldn't have yelled at him like that. He looked so shocked."

She felt, more than heard, her husband chuckle. "Emma, love, he won't hate you. I think he knows everything we told him tonight is true, and furthermore, he's known it for a while, he just needed help to admit it. Now, he'll think about it, and come to the conclusion that he needs to move on, no matter how hard he finds it. We just have to be here to support him, and we will be."

"What about Dumbledore though?" Emma asked.

Charles narrowed his eyes and a very lion-like growl emanated from him. "Let him try. He'll discover that the Gryffindor line isn't as dead as he would like to think."

"What do you mean?"

Charles looked down at his wife and smiled slightly. "I mean that the Potters are the last of the Gryffindor line. If necessary, I will cede the title of Lord Gryffindor to Harry, with the understanding that if he dies, it will revert to me, and then James, and then the future version of Harry will inherit it once more."

"What do you mean, if necessary?" Emma asked suspiciously.

Charles growled again. "Despite the Unbreakable Vow, I don't trust Dumbledore as far as I could throw him. I don't trust him not to find some way to harm Harry. Therefore, although Harry can claim the title of Lord Slytherin now, he couldn't claim the title of Lord Gryffindor in this time unless I formally cede the title to him. If I do, then if necessary, Harry can shock Dumbledore by revealing his double Lordship. That might make the old coot back off a bit."

"You'd only do it if necessary though, right?" Emma queried.

"Oh, I'll cede the title to Harry as soon as he's recovered from tonight, and I'll explain my reasons for doing so. I want to do more research into the Slytherin line as well; I suspect that the Slytherin Heirs have more blood talents than simply Parseltongue."

"And what does that mean?" Emma asked, her interest aroused at Charles' theory.

Charles smiled at her. "Just as the Gryffindor Heirs have a hereditary lion animagus form, separate from their personal animagus form, there have also been rumors over the centuries that the Slytherin Heirs, if they fully accepted their heritage, could transform into the King of Snakes, the Basilisk. I think that Harry, despite having accepted in theory that he's Lord Slytherin, doesn't feel worthy to hold the title, therefore, he hasn't got the Basilisk animagus form yet. I think its hiding somewhere within him, ready to come out when he fully accepts that he is a Slytherin as well as a Gryffindor."

"So, do you want me to help you research?" Emma asked with a grin.

Looking at the remains of the dinner, Charles grinned and tugged her up from the table. "Yes. But not now, I just want to have a quiet, lazy evening with you, without worrying about anything."

Emma laughed quietly and pulled Charles into the living room. Soon, they were engrossed in reading about the history of the Hogwarts Founders.

Back at Marauder Manor, Orion had gone to his study. Opening a bottle of Firewhiskey, he sat behind his desk, staring at the photos of Hermione that he'd brought with him, and, using his Pensieve in projector mode, replaying images of Hermione and himself from their schooldays and the early years of their marriage. Finally, after consuming more than half the bottle of Firewhiskey, and looking at over a hundred images, he broke down and wept. Among the tears, he slid the wedding ring off his finger and turned it over in his hand, one finger gently caressing the outside while reading the inscription on the inside.

To Harry. Our love will last forever. Hermione.

"Oh, Hermione. I hope Charles is right and that you won't hate me for this," he whispered. Wiping away his tears and giving the ring one last rub, he opened his safe and put the ring inside, along with his Pensieve. Closing the safe again he took a deep breath.

"Goodbye, Hermione," he said softly. "I hope we meet again someday." Then he turned and left the study, falling asleep on the couch shortly afterwards. Noddy found him there, and, shaking his head, levitated his master to his bed and tucked him in.

A couple of months later, at Hogwarts, James, Remus and Severus were outside, after their last class of the day, stretched out underneath one of the trees on the ground. Sirius had a detention immediately after their class so he wasn't with them. This was alright, as it gave the cousins a chance to talk without Sirius constantly interrupting every five seconds.

"So, how are things going in Slytherin?" James asked Severus. It

was coming up to Christmas; their first Christmas at Hogwarts, and Severus had been withdrawing from them a bit. He still participated in the pranks that they occasionally played, but he was also making an effort to fit in with the other Slytherins. The one thing he didn't do, however, was go along with the Muggle-born baiting that his Housemates indulged in. Instead, he reported instances of this to Remus, who passed it along to James and Sirius, and the four usually got together to prank the perpetrators as payback.

Severus shrugged. "Good. The others have stopped harassing me, and they don't suspect that I'm part of the Marauders. They are a bit annoyed that I'm friends with three Gryffindors, but they respect family above all, so they're not making too much of an issue of it. Slughorn's still a rotten Head of House. I need to talk to Dad though, over Christmas."

"About what?" Remus questioned. "You could just come to the Shrieking Shack on the full moon, before it rises, or the morning after. It's next week," he offered.

Severus smiled at his brother. "I think I'm developing some sort of magical talent. I've been able to hear people's thoughts if I concentrate on one person long enough, and I've noticed that I get a headache in the Great Hall because of it. Also, have you three noticed that Dumbledore doesn't like us much? He stares at us in the Great Hall, and I get this sense of pressure in my mind when he looks at me. Have you noticed this?"

James and Remus were frowning. "I've noticed something too, that pressure you mentioned, Sev, but I haven't got any headaches from it," James said, rolling over onto his back and staring at the sky. It was November so the weather was beginning to turn cloudy and the air had a definite chill to it.

"What about you Remus?" James asked.

Remus shook himself out of his thoughts. "What? Oh, that headache thing. I've felt nothing, but then, I'm a werewolf, so I might not notice what you guys do."

"True," Severus admitted. "I wonder what changed though; he liked us well enough before he went away that day after Hogwarts started."

"Dad told me that Dumbledore went to tea with him and Mum and Uncle Orion. They had some sort of argument I think," James said. "What does that have to do with us though?"

"What if Dumbledore asked about Dad's past and Dad refused to tell him? Maybe he doesn't like us because of something Dad did," Severus said. To him, used to thinking about plots within plots, as it was a natural state of mind within Slytherin house to wonder what people's motives were for any given action, he was naturally suspicious that Dumbledore was trying to use them against Orion, and he didn't much like that idea at all.

Neither did Remus or James. "But, that's ridiculous!" James exploded, sitting up and running his fingers through his hair in agitation. "I mean, what is he going to do if Uncle Orion refuses to give in? Hurt us? Kill us? Deliberately make up some excuse to expel us?"

"Stop being so dramatic!" Severus snapped, rolling his eyes. "I have no doubt that Dad thought of that possibility and took steps to prevent us being hurt. What they are, I don't know, but he'll have taken that into consideration. We're safe, I'm quite sure."

James slowly relaxed and lay back down again. Severus turned to Remus and said more quietly, "I accept your offer Remus, I'll be there next week. Do you need to tell Madam Pomfrey?"

Remus tilted his head to the side. "It would be best," he replied slowly.

"That way, you don't get in trouble because a staff member knows where you are. Will you come on the night, or the next morning?"

"Night I think," was Severus' answer. "I'll be safe, in the Shack, while you and Dad are outside, and then I get to talk to him the next morning, while you're recovering."

Remus nodded and gave Severus a brief hug. "Have you figured out what Dad's Parseltongue talent means yet?" he asked.

Severus scowled. "No. Not yet. I haven't been able to find the relevant books. You two could help you know."

"We could," Remus admitted. "But you, being the Slytherin of the three of us, and with Parseltongue being a Slytherin trait, we thought you'd be the best to do it."

"Hmmp. Are you sure you weren't meant to be in Slytherin. You just slithered your way out of research like you'd been in Slytherin all along," Severus grumped, although he wasn't truly annoyed.

Remus just laughed and poked James in the shoulder. "Hey, James, wake up. What do you think about the Parseltongue thing?"

James opened one eye and then sat up with a yawn. "I think we should just leave it be. Uncle Orion will tell us what it means if it's important. What I want to know is who he really is. The Parseltongue thing is one piece of the puzzle, not the whole puzzle."

"Exactly. We discover what the Parseltongue thing means, we have one more clue to add to the ones we already have," Remus exclaimed.

"I think you three are being entirely too nosy about your Dad's past and should just leave it alone," a voice said behind them.

The three boys looked up to find Lily standing above them.

"Lily!" Severus yelled, jumping up and almost falling back down again in his haste to greet her. She smiled as he regained his balance. "Why the hurry Sev? We saw each other in class an hour ago," she said with a grin, seating herself on the grass.

"We did but we couldn't talk then," Severus said, sitting next to her. James moved so he was on Lily's other side and Remus sat on Severus' other side. They formed a rough circle, with their books in the middle.

"So, why are you three determined to find out about Orion's past," Lily asked, curious. Remus, Severus and James looked a bit embarrassed. "Well, he's said that he'll tell us the story when we're older, but he lets these little hints slip, hints that he might not even be aware of, and we're being driven mad knowing that we have six more years before we find out the truth," James admitted.

"Have you ever thought that he might have good reasons for not telling you, reasons that have nothing to do with your age?" Lily asked.

"What do you mean?" Severus asked with a frown.

"Like, if you were ever captured by the Dark Lord, or someone else wanted to find out about your father's past, if you knew all about it, they could torture you and you'd tell them everything," Lily said. Her voice was mostly calm but there was a slight tremble in it as she thought about her friends being captured and tortured by Voldemort.

James, Remus and Severus looked at each other, thunderstruck. They hadn't thought about that, and they suddenly realized that they'd misjudged Orion somewhat. He was trying to keep them safe, they realized, and their enthusiasm for discovering his secrets was dampened.

"At least we can discover the meaning behind his Parseltongue talent. That's safe enough," Remus finally muttered.

"He's a Parselmouth?" Lily asked, shocked.

"Yeah, why? It doesn't make him a Dark wizard!" Severus replied hotly, defending his father fiercely.

Lily looked taken aback. "I wasn't suggesting that it did," she replied. She waited until Severus had calmed down, and then she continued, "I just know the significance of it."

"You do?" the three young Potters said in unison, looking shocked.

Lily smiled. "I do. It's a Slytherin blood trait, meaning that only those that are related to Salazar Slytherin are Parselmouths. I've done some digging in the library, trying to find out about the Hogwarts Founders for that history assignment that's due in soon. I thought I'd research Slytherin first so I looked through the Slytherin yearbooks, which go back to when Hogwarts was first founded. Along the way, I found out some facts about Voldemort. He used to be Tom Marvolo Riddle. I found his name in the old yearbooks, he'd put Voldemort as his nickname. I thought that was rather arrogant, I mean, Voldemort stands for Flight of Death. Voldemort's afraid of death. Then I got interested in his history. That package I got from the Ministry the other day contained the Slytherin family tree. Salazar Slytherin had a son and a daughter. Voldemort is descended from his daughter, not his son, and that line ends with Voldemort. I couldn't see where the son's line ended; it was blurred, as though something was wrong with it. But the fact that your father is a parselmouth and isn't Voldemort's brother or something means that he's descended from Slytherin's son. It's the only logical explanation."

"And what does that mean?" Remus asked impatiently. He didn't like the fact that Lily had thought to dig through those old records when

he hadn't, although the Ministry would give out genealogical information to anyone who was interested in trying to trace a link to ancient families, hence the reason that Lily, a first year student, was able to get the relevant information.

"You don't see it do you?" Severus whispered, shocked. "Slytherin, like the other families in those times, would have kept to the old laws. Only a male heir could inherit the title of Lord Slytherin. If Dad's descended from Slytherin's son, then that means..." he trailed off, unable to say it.

James did it for him. "Bloody hell, Uncle Orion's the Heir of Slytherin," he whispered.

Author Note

Hi guys. I'm not going to apologise for the length of time between updates. I know it's been a while. Real life interfered with illness and other things. I have also been working on my original story and I am pleased to announce that the first book is complete, pending a couple of descriptions that I'm inserting into the story, and I'm currently working on the second book. If I disappear for a while again, please assume that real life has taken over once more. I won't abandon this story and there won't be any more three month waits between updates like there was for the end of Dark Apprentice. At least, I hope there won't be. So, I hope you like this chapter, it was a really difficult one to write.

May the Force be with you

Padawan Lynne

PS: Thanks to everyone who pointed out my mistake with Nagini in the last chapter of DA. I'll get round to fixing it eventually.

Chapter Twenty: Explanations and Voldemort

The next week, on the night of the full moon, Remus, Madam Pomfrey and Severus made their way to the Whomping Willow. As the trio got closer to the temperamental tree, a black wolf detached itself from the shadows and trotted towards them, morphing seamlessly into Orion as they arrived.

"Good evening Poppy. Hello you two," Orion said with a smile, ruffling his sons' hair, ignoring the groans as the boys tried to make their hair flat again. After speaking with Poppy and arranging for her to pick Remus up at the usual time the next morning, Orion turned and led the two boys into the tunnel leading to the Shrieking Shack, while Poppy returned to the castle.

As they entered the Shrieking Shack, Remus made his way to the bed and curled up on it, waiting for the moon to rise, while Orion and Severus sat on the other side of the room. Severus was looking between his father and his brother, not quite sure how to describe his problem.

"You mentioned in your letter last week that you had a problem with your magic?" Orion prompted him.

Severus shrugged, wrapping his arms round himself. "I don't know what's happening, and I don't like it, Dad. Do you know what it is?"

Orion tilted his head to one side, considering the situation. "Why don't you tell me what's going on and I'll do what I can to help," he suggested.

Severus took a deep breath. "You're going to think it's silly," he began, but Orion shook his head firmly.

"Nothing you have a problem with could be silly, Severus, we've been through this before. Now, why don't you tell me what the problem is."

He locked gazes with his son, and then felt an odd sensation in his mind, a tentative probing against his shields. In that moment he understood what Severus' problem was, and furthermore, how to fix it. He still wanted Severus to tell him in his own words though.

Giving in to the inevitable, Severus tore his eyes away from his father's steady, unblinking gaze and refocused his attention on Remus. Speaking more to his brother than to his father, he said, "I can see people's thoughts and memories when I concentrate hard on one person, and I get a headache when I'm in the Great Hall because I can't seem to shut it off, everyone's thinking too much. Then, Dumbledore's been staring at us, at me, and Remus, and James, and James and I are getting headaches from that too, it's like a pressure in our minds. What's going on?"

Orion didn't speak for a moment, and then said, "Severus, I want you to focus on me, try and see my thoughts." He brought his shields up to maximum, and waited patiently.

Severus concentrated hard on his father. Unlike the others he'd tried to use his new talent on though, there was nothing. It was like he was trying to see through a wall, it was impossible. Finally, he shook his head.

"I can't get through," he said, puzzled.

Orion smiled at him. "I know what's going on Severus, and it's nothing to be alarmed about. You've got a magical talent known as Legilimency. It allows you to read people's minds, see their memories, thoughts, and feelings. I'll teach you how to use it, but you need to promise me something."

"What?" Severus asked, relieved that his new talent had a name and that his father both knew how to use it and would teach him how to use it as well.

Orion looked very serious when he replied, "Once you've learnt how to use it, do not use it just because you can. You can use it passively, to tell whether someone's telling the truth or not, but reading someone's mind without their permission is like eavesdropping. In other words, don't do it unless you have very good reason."

"Such as?"

"Such as if you're in a life or death situation and you need to know who your friends are and who aren't. Also, keep your talent a secret from everyone except those you trust to keep quiet about it. This talent makes many people uncomfortable, as everyone expects their private thoughts to remain exactly that, private."

"How do I stop others reading my mind, and what about Dumbledore?"

Orion smiled, but it was strained. "From your description, Dumbledore is using Legilimency against you, keeping it at a low level so it wouldn't be noticed. You can block him using a technique known as Occlumency. It's the opposite of Legilimency and will protect your mind from outside influences. Once your mind is properly shielded, you should find that not only will your headaches stop, but because part of learning Occlumency is learning how to organize your mind, you should find studying easier as well."

"Can you teach me Occlumency too?" Severus asked eagerly.

Orion chuckled. "You need to learn Occlumency before you can learn Legilimency anyway, so the answer is yes, Severus."

Their conversation was interrupted as the moon rose and Remus started to change. Orion quickly got up and pushed Severus into the next room of the shack where there was another bed. Quickly conjuring a blanket and placing warming charms in the room, Orion said, "Stay in here until I open the door tomorrow. We'll finish our

conversation then."

Severus gave him a quick hug. "Thanks, Dad."

Orion hugged him back. "You're welcome. I have to go now." He shut the door abruptly, and Severus sat down on the nearby bed, hearing a howling noise from the first room. He winced as the sound of breaking bones came through the walls, and tried to block his ears. Soon the noises died down and then two howls were heard, along with scratching noises as the two wolves headed down the passageway. Shrugging, he settled down on the bed and closed his eyes.

He awoke to someone shaking his shoulder. Slowly opening his eyes, he realized that Orion was sitting by the bed, and smiling tiredly at him.

"Good morning sleepyhead. You're lucky that it's the weekend today, I was able to let you sleep in a bit."

Severus yawned, causing Orion to wrinkle his nose and cast a breath freshening charm on him. "Good morning, Dad. Is Remus alright?" the eleven-year-old replied, sitting up and swinging his legs over the side of the bed.

"Remus is fine; Madam Pomfrey took him back to Hogwarts ten minutes ago. I said I'd bring you back when we'd finished our conversation."

Severus frowned briefly and then his expression cleared, remembering the conversation from the previous night. "You said you'd teach me that Occu-thingy," he said.

Orion chuckled. "Occlumency, Severus, and yes I did say that. Do you have any questions about it?"

Severus' eyes gleamed; yes he had lots of questions. "Can you tell me what it is in more detail?"

Orion moved to the bed and gave him a hug. "Sure. Occlumency is a branch of mind magic which basically shields your mind, allowing you to keep your thoughts and memories private, and safe from other Legilimens."

"Legilimens?" Severus asked, puzzled.

"Legilimens are wizards or witches who know how to use Legilimency. People who know how to use Occlumency are called Occlumens. A wizard or witch can be an Occlumens without being a Legilimens, but a Legilimens is always an Occlumens as well." Orion explained, clearing up Severus' confusion. "Like I said last night, Legilimency allows a wizard or witch to read someone's thoughts, see their memories, and even, influence their actions. Most Legilimens use their wands to cast the spell, but the best practitioners of the art can do it wandlessly and silently. They just have to make eye contact."

"That's what Dumbledore's doing, right?" Severus queried.

Orion scowled. "From your description, it sounds likely. He shouldn't be doing it of course, but because he's doing it silently, no one knows it's happening, and so he can't be held to account for it."

"But it's bad though," Severus asked, wanting confirmation.

Orion nodded. "Very bad. Until you're proficient in Occlumency, I suggest trying to avoid looking him in the eyes as much as possible. Meet his eyes briefly and then look away, so it's not obvious that you're trying to avoid him."

"Is it difficult to learn Occlumency?" was the next question Severus asked.

Orion considered the question. "It depends," he finally answered. "It isn't something you can master in a single night; you have to keep practicing every day. Once your shields are built, you have to keep reinforcing them as well, so they don't crumble. Also, you have to have a teacher who is an Occlumens."

Orion fell silent, his eyes growing distant briefly. Shaking himself out of his memories, he finished with, "And it's a good idea if the teacher and student like each other, or at least trust each other."

"That won't be a problem for us though, right, Dad?" Severus said, trying to sound confident. Occlumency was sounding difficult, but he wanted to learn it. His father grinned at him and ruffled his hair.

"No, that particular aspect won't be a problem. I'll start your proper lessons over Christmas and continue them over the summer, but the best way to start learning Occlumency is to start by clearing your mind."

"Clearing my mind?" Severus repeated, thoroughly confused.

He looked up to see an odd expression on his father's face. He looked as though he was remembering something that both amused and hurt him.

"How do I do that?" Severus asked.

Orion was tempted, very tempted, to tell him to research it and work it out himself, but then he remembered that Occlumency worked best when the teacher actively helped the student, rather than relying on the student to figure out how to make the techniques work.

"Each person is different, but I like to use meditation when I clear my mind and work on my shields," Orion offered. "It is more difficult to learn when you're young because you're still learning to control your emotions, which is a big part of learning Occlumency. It isn't

impossible though."

Severus nodded, thinking hard. "How do I start? I want the headaches to stop," he said, not quite complaining but not far off.

"The easiest way to stop the headaches is to stop trying to read people's minds," Orion said with a touch of sternness in his tone, causing Severus to wince slightly and look up at him with wide eyes.

"I didn't know that was what I was doing," he said, trying to defend his actions. Orion raised an eyebrow.

"Really? You told me that you noticed the headaches more when you concentrated on trying to hear people's thoughts. It would have been logical for you to think that since concentrating on hearing thoughts gave you the headaches, maybe stopping that activity would stop the headaches."

Severus drew his legs up and wrapped his arms round them. "I did, but then Dumbledore entered the picture and I didn't know what to think. Sorry."

Orion relented; it wasn't Severus' fault that his talent had chosen to awaken at an inconvenient time, and it was natural for him to want to practice using it. "I know it wasn't your fault Sev, just don't do it unless you truly need to, OK. As for practicing using it, when you get that far, I'll be your first practice partner, and then we can move on to others, like your aunt and uncle, or James and Sirius if they agree."

Severus nodded vigorously, and continued pressing his father for details on how to clear his mind. Orion taught him a brief meditation technique, getting Severus to focus only on his breathing, and nothing else. As his breathing calmed and his focus narrowed to only his breath, Severus found that his mind was miraculously clearing and becoming calm. Of course, being eleven years old, the discovery that it was working promptly broke his concentration and undid all his

hard work, much to his frustration.

"You'll get it. Do this every night before bed; it would be easier if you drew your bed curtains so your dorm mates don't know what you're doing. If you keep practicing, it should become easier and easier to clear your mind," Orion said, reassuring Severus, who had become annoyed at the fact that he'd lost concentration. Severus nodded, and then said, "Dad, what was your teacher like?"

"You mean my Occlumency teacher?" Orion asked.

Severus nodded, and Orion bit back a chuckle. He could just imagine the look of shock on his son's face if he let slip the little detail that it was Severus himself who had taught Orion. His amusement died when he realized that it would not be pleasant for Severus to find out how his future self had initially treated Orion, and it wasn't something that could be revealed now, not with Dumbledore snooping around in the Marauders' minds.

"He wasn't very nice in the beginning," he hedged. Seeing the impatient look that Severus was giving him, he sighed. "Remember that I said there had to be trust between the teacher and the student?" At Severus' nod, he continued, "Well, he didn't like me, I didn't like him, and neither of us trusted the other, or at least, we didn't trust each other enough for the lessons to be successful. About halfway through the lessons, there was an incident which showed both of us that we'd misjudged each other, and after that, he made more of an effort to teach me, and I made more of an effort to actually learn."

"So he did teach you then, eventually," Severus said.

Orion hugged him. "Yes."

"How long did it take you to learn Occlumency?"

"I was fifteen when I started, and it took me a year to master the basics, and then another two years after that to master the more advanced techniques. I'm constantly revising and refining my shields and my techniques so I don't get trapped into only practicing it one way. Occlumency is a very individualized branch of magic, and no two wizards organize their minds the same way. You learn the basics, and then develop your own style of mental defence. Understand?"

Severus frowned. "I think so, Dad. So, how long will it take me?"

Orion frowned as he considered the question. "If you practice it every night, it shouldn't take too long, but you need to keep practicing. Also, don't bury your emotions, you're allowed to feel them, just don't let them control your actions."

Severus nodded, in Slytherin, no student acted on their emotions; it was foolish to do so. He thought that he wouldn't find that part hard, he was already used to managing his emotions after almost half a year in the snake pit. Remembering his father's connection with his house, he wondered if the older wizard would be angry at their detective work.

"Dad," he said hesitantly.

Orion caught the hesitant tone and looked down. Severus looked nervous, and Orion wondered what had happened to cause that nervousness.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

Severus was debating the wisdom of revealing the fact that the Marauders had found out one of Orion's secrets, but it was too late to back out now. Sighing, he met his father's concerned gaze and said, "We had an assignment in History of Magic,"

"And," Orion prompted. "If you're going to tell me you fell asleep and

missed what it was, don't worry. I slept through most of that class too."

Laughing briefly at the thought of his father snoozing in History of Magic the way James and Sirius did, Severus shook his head.

"That's not it. Lily was researching Salazar Slytherin, because the assignment was on the Hogwarts Founders. She searched through the records here, and got some information from the Ministry of Magic. She found out that Parseltongue is a Slytherin blood trait and she researched the Slytherin family tree. Salazar had a son and a daughter; his son inherited the title of Lord Slytherin. We discovered that the daughter's line ends with Voldemort, but the son's line is blurred."

He paused for breath and Orion waited, knowing what the Marauders' deduction would have been. Taking a deep breath, Severus said, "We think that, since the son's line is blurred, and you're a Parselmouth, that you're descended from Salazar's son, and that makes you the true Heir of Slytherin, instead of Voldemort."

Severus dropped his eyes to the floor, expecting an angry rebuke for daring to poke around in his father's past. What he wasn't expecting to hear was a chuckle, and when he looked up, Orion's eyes were warm and there was a light in them as he shook his head.

"Lily would have got on so well with my wife," he murmured. Seeing that Severus was still nervous, he smiled and said, "I'm not angry Severus, I was expecting that part of my secret to come out sooner rather than later. It's not so much a secret as something that I'm keeping to myself for use at a later date if necessary."

Severus frowned as he remembered something else they'd read about the Slytherin line. "When we were researching, we found that the Slytherin Heirs, from the male line, always have a basilisk animagus form as well as any other forms they might have. Why

aren't you a basilisk as well as a lion and wolf?"

Orion's smile was a little sad when he replied, "Because I need to fully accept my Slytherin heritage in order to gain that form. It's inside me, waiting for me to accept it, but so far, I haven't."

"Why not?" Severus demanded. "Slytherin is a good house to be associated with!"

Orion chuckled. "I know it is Severus, I just need a bit more time. I've accepted it in theory, but the basilisk needs total acceptance, not just acceptance in theory. I'll get there, I promise you that. It needs to remain a secret for now though, so don't go telling your housemates that your father's the Heir of Slytherin, OK."

Severus grumbled at that. "Do you know how much prestige I'd have, being related to the heir of our house founder?" he demanded.

Orion frowned at him. "That is precisely why I don't want you spreading it around, Severus. It is far better that the other students respect you for your own talents rather than for who you're related to. Understand?"

Severus grumbled a bit more but acquiesced. "I can still tell Remus, James, and Lily that we were right though, can't I?" he pleaded.

Orion pulled him into a hug. "Yes, imp, you can. No one else though. And impress on the others the importance of this remaining just between the five of you. Alright?"

Severus nodded vigorously as they exited the tunnel and stood for a few minutes gazing at Hogwarts. Finally, Orion turned to Severus. "I can Apparate you back to the grounds, or we can walk. What do you want to do?"

Severus thought about it. He didn't really get a lot of alone time with

his father, despite the fact that Orion tried to treat him and Remus the same. Part of it was his own solitary nature, some of it was the nature of Orion's job, and then there were the full moon nights, when, at least for now, Remus had Orion all to himself. With that in mind, Severus said firmly, "Walk."

Orion smiled inwardly. Severus would be mortified if he learned that he'd been broadcasting his last thoughts to any half-decent Legilimens in the area, and rather loudly too. He resolved to make more time for Severus, whenever he needed it. The last thing he wanted was for one of his sons to feel that he was being pushed aside because of the special circumstances surrounding the other.

After delivering Severus back to Hogwarts, and briefly stopping by the infirmary to check on Remus, Orion Apparated home. There, he changed into his work robes and, hood up, Apparated to the Department of Mysteries. It was time to brief his team on the joint mission against Voldemort and his Death Eaters. He would be joined by Eagle and her team for the briefing, and his stomach flipped over and over for few minutes at the thought of seeing Eagle again, until he sternly told himself to stop acting like a hormonal teenager. This was a work situation; he needed to keep his attraction to his colleague under strict control.

Arriving in the briefing room, he found it empty. Glad of the few minutes of solitude, he ran through some Occlumency exercises, clearing his mind quickly and easily, a habit borne of years of practice and study. He opened his eyes and slid into his Hunter persona as he heard the other Unspeakables arriving. Eagle was first through the door, and they nodded to each other. Their respective teams entered as a group, separating once more as the door closed and the standard privacy wards and silencing charms activated, making the briefing room private.

When the room was warded, Orion cleared his throat, drawing the attention of his team mates and the attention of the other team as

well. Walking to the front of the room, he turned to face them and said, "I presume you all know why you're here." At the nods, he smiled and then turned serious. "Good. We're going to be working together to take out Voldemort's high ranking Death Eaters. It's likely that Voldemort himself might be at the location we're heading to, if he is, leave him to me. Our mission is to kill or capture as many of his high level minions as possible, if we do that, then Voldemort will be forced to rely on the low level flunkies. There is a reason they're low level flunkies though, they're not usually the most intelligent of the bunch and rather incompetent."

"I thought that described all the Death Eaters," Kestrel muttered, causing a wave of laughter to ripple through the room. Orion smiled slightly and responded, "Yes, well, one could argue that I suppose, however, there is a difference in power and skill level. The high-level Death Eaters are the most skilled and the most dangerous. The lower level minions usually rely more on brute force and scare tactics. That's why we've been assigned to take out the dangerous ones. The Toad felt it was a wise course of action to send the best teams to take out the best Death Eaters."

He stepped back, allowing Eagle to take centre stage and watched as she fielded questions and organized the way the teams would work together. Finally, one of Eagle's team members raised his hand.

"What do we do if Voldemort's there?" he asked.

Orion looked at him and smiled wolfishly. "Leave him to me," he said, and the tone of his voice made it clear that if Voldemort engaged Orion in a battle, it was likely that the Dark Lord would be the loser. The Unspeakables all shivered, Hunter had developed a reputation as a ruthless fighter but fighting Death Eaters and going up against Voldemort were two very different things.

No more words were said as the Unspeakables readied themselves for the mission. At an unspoken signal, the two teams disappeared

from the briefing room, landing in a horribly familiar graveyard. With a shudder, Orion realized that Voldemort's headquarters was Riddle Manor.

"Hunter? Are you alright?" Eagle asked. She was concerned for her fellow leader, and not just from a professional standpoint, she realized. She stared at him until he turned his own gaze towards her.

"I'm fine. I just have some bad memories of this place," he said, and Eagle nodded, knowing that he meant his future memories but not prying further. She waited until he'd pulled himself together and then gave his shoulder a friendly squeeze.

"We're on in two minutes," she said, before moving silently back to where her team was positioned. Orion nodded to himself and signaled to the rest of the Wolves, who moved into their own attack positions. He cleared his mind and let his training take over. Once the two minutes were up, the Unspeakables moved forward.

Orion transformed into Shadow, leading his team, who had all transformed as well, at the front of the group. With loud howls, they leapt through the windows on the ground floor, the crash of glass alerting the Death Eaters inside that something was up. Smoothly changing back into his human form, Hunter flung a decapitation hex at the nearest Death Eater, smiling grimly when he realized that he'd just killed Rodolphus LeStrange. That was one Death Eater who wouldn't be attacking Neville's parents in the future. Twisting to avoid a Cruciatus curse from another senior Death Eater, he threw a few Unforgivables of his own. Noises behind him told him that his team and Eagle's team were taking on the other Death Eaters that were spread out in the other rooms on the ground floor. Widening his senses, Orion realized that Voldemort was indeed at home, and was on the upper level. Keeping a mental eye on where the Dark Lord was, he killed a few more Death Eaters before drawing back to catch his breath and to see how his team was faring.

The others were doing well. Kestrel would need a promotion when it came to her black ranking, Orion noted interestedly. Kestrel, currently a three-black, meaning that she could cast the Imperius successfully but struggled with the other two, had a Death Eater under the Cruciatus, and was showing no signs of letting up.

"Oy, Kestrel, I think he's had enough," Orion yelled to her when he noticed the Death Eater's eyes glazing over. Kestrel abruptly stopped the curse when she heard his shout, and looked down at the condition of her victim with some surprise.

"Uh, oops," she said when her boss raised an eyebrow. Feeling the need to defend her actions, she said, "He said something about turning me into Voldemort's plaything. I just snapped."

Orion shrugged. "Remember to keep control of your emotions at all times," was all he said, before shooting a disemboweling curse at a Death Eater who was trying to sneak up on them. The pair separated, and Orion went to check on the rest of his team, finding that there hadn't been as many Death Eaters as they'd thought, and the two Unspeakable teams had decimated the Death Eater higher ranks fairly well. Most were dead, only a few still lived, and those that did would require intensive hospital treatment to recover.

As Eagle and Orion met at the staircase, they compared notes. Two members of Eagle's team were seriously hurt, and one had died. The two Unspeakables that still lived had Portkeyed back to the Department of Mysteries for medical treatment, taking the dead body of their team mate with them. The same could be said of Orion's team. Diamond had sustained a nasty stomach wound, and had Portkeyed back to the Department infirmary, and Kestrel had also Portkeyed back to get help for a wound that had almost killed her. Only some emergency healing magic had saved her from being sliced completely in half. Reaper, true to his name, had taken out all the Death Eaters that had taken him on, only sustaining bruised knuckles as a result of punching one Death Eater in the face. Shade

had died when he'd taken on three Death Eaters at once in order to cover Kestrel when she Portkeyed out of the manor. His body, though, was still lying where he'd fallen, on top of two of the Death Eaters that he'd managed to kill before succumbing to his wounds.

Suddenly feeling lightheaded, Orion sat down heavily on the bottom step. Looking down, he saw that his robes had a large, damp patch on them, and he realized that at some point during the battle, he'd been hit and hadn't felt it. It was bleeding sluggishly, and didn't seem to be immediately fatal, no matter how he was currently feeling.

He was about to open his robes and check the wound, when his hands were caught and held in a firm, yet gentle grip.

"Not here," Eagle said firmly. "We're still in danger."

"Indeed you are," a voice said behind them.

Getting up off the step and backing away quickly, Orion, Eagle, Reaper, and the rest of Eagle's team who were still in the manor, faced the speaker.

Voldemort stood at the top of the stairs, looking down at them with an expression of anticipation. "I must thank you," he said causing the Unspeakables to blink in shock.

"Why?" Orion finally hissed.

"Because you got rid of some people that I'd been meaning to get rid of for a while," Voldemort replied, moving down a couple of steps. "You see, I knew you wouldn't be able to resist going after a lot of my high-level servants, getting rid of all of them at once, and so I arranged this meeting. You can imagine my pleasure when my little mole within your department was able to get hold of the plans for this raid and I realized you'd fallen for the ruse. You didn't get rid of my high-level servants; you got rid of some low-level idiots who were

Polyjuiced to look like them. "

As the Unspeakables looked around, the very people they thought they'd killed suddenly appeared from the shadows and surrounded them. One thought ran through all of their minds as they looked at each other.

"Oh, fuck."

Chapter Twenty-One: Acceptance and Fate

Orion stared at the Death Eaters, and then at Voldemort. He could feel the tension in his colleagues as they looked around. It seemed like a hopeless situation. Outnumbered, surrounded, with no way out. Orion had felt Voldemort raise anti-Portkey and anti-Apparition wards the moment he'd sprung his trap, giving the Unspeakables no time to Portkey or Apparate out, even if they'd tried.

"Hunter, what are we going to do?" Eagle hissed. "There's too many Death Eaters to fight, and what about the Dark Lord?"

Orion thought fast, and then an idea came to him. "Leave His Scaliness and the merry morons to me. Just be ready with your Portkeys," he hissed back.

"If you think we're leaving you here alone with this lot, you're mad," Reaper said from behind Orion. As Orion turned to face him, the only other Wolf in the group shrugged. "Do you know how much trouble I'd be in with the others if I left you here and saved my own skin?"

Orion smiled slightly. "Thank you," was all he said, but Reaper got the underlying message and nodded tersely. "I hope you've got a plan boss, otherwise we're all dead," he said.

"Are you quite finished whispering over there?" Voldemort asked in a bored tone. Orion glared at him and prepared to put his plan into action. It was something that Severus Snape would have labeled pure Gryffindor foolishness, but it just might work.

"We have," Orion said, staring directly into Voldemort's eyes. He'd used the time that the conversation had given him to perform some wandless, silent, healing magic. It wasn't quite as good as what he'd get in the department infirmary but he'd live. The blood loss made him a little unsteady but he'd had to fight in situations when he'd been worse off so he wasn't worried.

"And what have you decided?" Voldemort asked. The Death Eaters moved closer, eager to torture and kill the trapped Unspeakables. The Unspeakables formed into a tight circle, all facing their captors, none willing to give in, or show fear.

Orion smiled wolfishly and then hissed "Attack!"

The Unspeakables fired Unforgivables at the Death Eaters, who were standing so close that they weren't all able to avoid the deadly curses. Orion had forgone firing at a Death Eater, he had shot his Killing Curse straight at Voldemort, who was forced to dive out of the way, which was a most undignified thing for a Dark Lord to do, he thought. As his colleagues spread out, fighting the Death Eaters, he faced Voldemort. A thrill ran through him at facing his old enemy again, the thrill of matching himself against his equal once more.

Voldemort painfully rose to his feet, a gash along the side of his head bleeding sluggishly. He glared hatefully at Orion, who regarded him coolly. The Basilisk inside him was hissing with anger and anticipation, wanting to be let out. Orion carefully monitored it; an uncontrolled transformation here would be disastrous.

Voldemort was eyeing Orion with something approaching respect in his gaze. A Dark Lord he might be, but Voldemort could appreciate, and respect, a powerful opponent, which was exactly what Orion was. Shaking his head, Voldemort fired a powerful Dark Arts spell at his enemy, hoping to separate Orion in half.

Diving out of the way of the spell, Orion fired a Cruciatus back, letting his magic flow around him. Voldemort matched him, and the air grew chokingly thick with the unrestrained power emanating from the two wizards. The other Unspeakables and the Death Eaters stopped fighting to watch the showdown between their two leaders, both sides gaping at the spectacle in front of them.

Orion and Voldemort barely noticed their audience, their attention was focused solely on each other. Orion was still wounded but he gave no thought to that, his healing magic before the battle had worked, so he could safely ignore it for now. Voldemort was feeling as dizzy as Orion thanks to his head wound, and he was furious over it.

"You think you can force me to back down, Hunter," he snarled.

Orion met his eyes and snarled back, "As a matter of fact, I do. You're nothing but a bully, and a coward."

"I am the Heir of Slytherin! How dare you insult me!" Voldemort roared.

Something in Orion snapped at that moment. He'd been researching his Slytherin heritage in an attempt to understand what it meant to be a Slytherin so he could finally accept it. In that moment, when Voldemort claimed that he was Slytherin's Heir, Orion fully understood what he'd been missing. Voldemort was trying to claim his heritage, and he wouldn't stand for it!

Hissing in anger, Orion switched to Parseltongue, shocking Voldemort badly as he hissed, "I am the true Heir of Slytherin, Tom Riddle!"

Voldemort backed up as his enemy transformed into a towering basilisk which smashed its way through the ceiling before coming back down again. He knew that he'd lost this fight. He'd been trying to force a basilisk transformation for years but hadn't succeeded, and now he knew why. Only the true heir had a basilisk animagus form, and it wasn't him.

As he backed further away, the basilisk peered down at him. Orion knew that he couldn't hold the form for long, it was a new animagus form for him and as such, he wouldn't be able to hold it for more than

a minute. He noted that none of the Death Eaters, or Voldemort, were meeting his eyes and he gave the snake equivalent of a sigh. It would be too much to hope for that the Death Eaters would be stupid enough to stare into his eyes. Shaking his head mentally, he lifted his tail, and then smacked Voldemort with it, sending the Dark Lord flying across the room and through the wall into the room beyond before he lost control of the basilisk form and began to transform back to his human form.

Snapping out of their shock, Eagle and the other Unspeakables quickly rounded up the Death Eaters, killing half of them as they attempted to escape, but taking the other half into custody. Eagle and Reaper remained behind to support Orion, as the rest of Eagle's team escorted the captured Death Eaters out of Riddle Manor and away from the wards so they could Portkey back to the Department of Mysteries.

"Why are you still here?" Orion muttered, tired from the transformation into his final animagus form.

"With all due respect, Lord Slytherin, we're not leaving you here alone with a pissed off Dark Lord," Reaper said firmly.

Orion whipped round to face his team mate, surprised. "You know what the basilisk form means?" he asked.

Reaper nodded. "That, and the ring that just appeared on your finger, my Lord," he said with a smirk. Orion looked down at his hand in shock, and indeed, on his right ring finger was the Slytherin family ring, proclaiming him as Lord Slytherin.

"Don't ever call me your Lord again, understand," he growled at Reaper, using a glamour spell to hide the ring from view. Reaper nodded, he'd been joking, but he understood why his boss wouldn't want to be viewed as similar to Voldemort.

"Watch out!" Eagle yelled as Voldemort threw a blasting curse at them. Orion dived to the ground and rolled, coming up facing his very distant cousin, even though his guts twisted sharply at acknowledging any familial link to Voldemort at all.

He aimed his wand at Voldemort and hissed, "Avada Kedavra!" at the same time as Voldemort yelled the same spell. The spells streaked across the distance between the two foes and smashed into each other. Once again, the Priori Incantatem effect occurred, and Voldemort's eyes widened as he realized that he and his enemy's wands were brothers.

Eagle and Reaper held their breaths as the beam of golden light hung in the air, beads of bright light being forced up and down it, powered by the will of the wizards holding the wands. Orion narrowed his eyes and focused all his will on making the beads go into Voldemort's wand, the same way he had when he was fourteen. He felt something inside him answer his silent plea for help, felt warmth envelop him as though he was being hugged by ghostly arms. With renewed determination, he forced the beads of light into Voldemort's wand, and watched as Voldemort broke the connection just before the wand could explode from the magic being forced into it.

Shaking with effort, thoroughly angry, and, even though he wouldn't admit it, scared, Voldemort snarled out, "Legilimens!" He was determined to find out exactly who his enemy was.

Orion felt Voldemort slam into his shields with all the unrestrained fury of a hurricane. He groaned and strengthened his shields, but he could feel them weakening under the assault. He might be powerful, but the initial burst of energy had cracked them and now Voldemort was seeking a way in.

Snarling with effort, he shoved Voldemort out of the outer layers of his mind, thankful that he kept his most treasured and important

memories locked behind layers of shielding that would take Voldemort weeks to penetrate, if he ever got through them at all. The effort of shoving the Dark Lord out of his mind had an unexpected consequence though. As Voldemort hit the wall after being thrown across the room from the force of Orion's mental shove, both wizards screamed in pain as their minds were assaulted by a force that ripped through their shields as though they weren't there.

Voldemort and Orion had time to weakly glare at each other and hiss "This is all your fault!" before they passed out.

Eagle and Reaper looked at each other and then Reaper said slowly, "Damn, I knew the boss was a good fighter but hell, facing down You-Know-Who like that isn't something I thought anyone would do."

At that moment, the building gave an ominous groan and the two Unspeakables quickly picked Orion's unconscious body up, Apparating him to St. Mungo's for treatment. They were able to do this as the anti-Apparition and anti-Portkey wards had failed within minutes of Voldemort falling unconscious. Seconds after they'd disappeared, the manor collapsed on top of the unconscious Dark Lord, burying him in rubble. Nagini, who had been returning from a hunt, was struck and killed by a large chunk of falling masonry, the Horcrux within her, which Voldemort had made only days before, dying at the same instant.

At Hogwarts, the students were gathering for dinner when Professor McGonagall came towards the Gryffindor table. James, Remus, Sirius and Lily were sitting together as they usually did, and they looked up as their Head of House stopped beside them.

"Remus, James, come with me please," she said softly, a worried expression on her face. As Remus and James got up, Severus came over from the Slytherin table.

"Is something wrong, Professor McGonagall?" he asked. "We're not

in trouble are we?"

McGonagall looked at him, and then sighed. "No, boys, you're not in trouble, but you have a visitor in Professor Dumbledore's office. I'm to take you there now."

James, Remus and Severus glanced at each other, worried. They all knew that Death Eaters were attacking people who fought against them. The only reason they could think of for them to be called away from dinner like this was if one or more of their parents had been injured. They followed Professor McGonagall up to Dumbledore's office, and when they got there, Charles and Emma stood up and faced them. The look in Charles' eyes sent a shiver of fear through all three boys.

"Is, is Dad," Remus began, voice trembling.

Severus finished his sentence for him, "Is he dead?"

Charles shook his head and opened his arms. Remus and Severus rushed into the embrace, hugging him as tightly as he was hugging them. In a hoarse voice, he said, "No, he's not dead but he is badly hurt. I've come to take you to St. Mungo's to see him."

Dumbledore, who had been sitting quietly up until then, stood up. "I'll make a Portkey from here," he said. Charles gave him a sharp look, and then assented, taking a sock from Dumbledore a couple of minutes later.

When they arrived at St. Mungo's, Charles and Emma led Remus, James and Severus to the private room where Orion was lying, unconscious, in a bed. Outside the room, Emma collapsed into a chair. Her eyes were red-rimmed from crying. The surviving members of the Wolves, as well as Eagle and her team were guarding the room.

Charles sat down beside his wife while James, Remus, and Severus all went to the window to look in. Orion was still unconscious, his face deathly pale. There were spells monitoring his vital signs, which were weak but stable. James sniffed and turned away, unable to stand the sight of his uncle lying so still in the bed. He ran over to his parents and Emma hugged him tightly, tears making their way silently down her face.

Remus and Severus felt a flash of jealousy at this, and then spotted a Healer walking towards the room.

"May we go and see him?" Remus asked.

The Healer frowned. "Are you relatives?" he asked.

"We're his sons," Severus answered, trying to sound strong and confident but the tremble in his voice gave him away. The Healer nodded and steered them towards the door.

"Go on in, but be very quiet. He's OK for now, but don't jostle him too much."

"Do you know what happened?" Charles asked, standing up and facing the Healer.

"We were just about to tell him," Reaper said, sounding rather shaky himself. The Healer frowned and led the combined group into Orion's room. Chairs were found, or conjured, and they all sat down, the Unspeakables on Orion's right side, Charles, Emma and James on his left. Remus and Severus had crawled onto their father's bed and were lying on either side of him. They'd managed to worm their way up the bed so that Orion's arms were around their shoulders, even though he didn't seem to be aware of their presence.

Casting sad glances at the bed, Reaper and Eagle launched into the tale of the battle, presenting it in a clinical, sanitized fashion so that it

wouldn't scare the kids, avoiding the exact details of what had happened with the fight and only telling broad general statements, in order to avoid the bloody, gory bits. When it came to the end of the fight, and the pain that both Orion and Voldemort had seemed to be in as a result of the Legilimency battle, the Healer looked startled.

"Of course, that's why he's been unconscious for so long. He's probably working on repairing whatever damage You-Know-Who did to his mind," the Healer muttered.

"But he will survive?" James asked anxiously.

The Healer checked Orion's vital signs, which had improved slightly while they'd been talking. "If he continues to improve, then yes, I would say so. He's a strong wizard, and that helps a lot with recovery.

Charles pulled his chair closer to the bed and reached out a hand, gently stroking Orion's hair, making sure not to disturb Severus or Remus, who had fallen asleep. "Hurry up and get better," he murmured. He stopped for a moment when he noticed Orion's arms tighten just a fraction around his children and then relax again.

"Come on, James, let's leave them alone for now," he said softly, pulling his son out of the room.

"Dad, I want to stay too," James complained. "I love him as much as they do."

Charles stopped dead, turned round and said, "I know you do, but they're his children, and while they love us, Orion's the only parent they have. Think how you would be feeling if it was your mother and I in there, would you want your cousins intruding when you're trying to spend time alone with us?"

James struggled with the question but eventually he had to admit that no, he wouldn't. "I hope he gets well soon," he finally whispered.

"So do I," Charles agreed, "so I can yell at him for endangering his life like that."

James stared at his dad in shock, and spluttered, "You're going to tell off Uncle Orion? Can I watch?"

Charles laughed. "Yes I am and no you can't," he said. "For one, it's not going to be like the sort of telling-off I'd give you if you misbehaved, and for another, even if it was, I wouldn't do it in public. He'd be humiliated if you, or Severus and Remus were there, and I won't do that to him."

James pouted at the missed opportunity but allowed himself to be led to the hospital canteen, where he was treated to dinner. After the meal was finished, he and Charles went back to Orion's room and sat there; watching him sleep and hoping that he improved.

The Healer had been right when he'd been explaining Orion's condition. Although Orion's body was unconscious, his mind was not. Orion had retreated inside his mind in order to repair his shields and he was currently floating around his mind, examining his shields in minute detail to determine where the repairs needed to be made. His contemplation was broken when he heard several familiar voices calling to him.

He turned round. There, coming towards him were his parents, followed by Sirius, and, his eyes blinked furiously, Severus and Remus too. He took a step back, and then stopped.

"This is a dream," he stated, trying to wrap his mind around seeing the older versions of the people he now knew as children in his mind.

"Yes and no," the older version of Remus said. "Dumbledore may be a manipulative old coot but he was right about one thing, Harry. The ones you love never leave you, we're here in spirit even if you can't

normally see us."

"You helped me during the battle," Orion said, remembering the feeling of warmth and love he'd got when he needed it the most. James nodded. "Yes, we did. We can talk, and explain everything in a more comfortable location though." He walked a bit further back into Orion's mind, and Orion followed. Voldemort wouldn't trick him like this; he could sense that these were, however implausibly, the spirits of his parents, his godfather, his honorary uncle, and his mentor.

He stepped through a door and was struck by the light, airy feel of the home that surrounded him. "Where are we?" he asked suspiciously.

"We're in a mental recreation of Godric's Hollow, Harry," Lily said examining him closely. "This is where we choose to reside, we built it in your mind, unknown to you, after we died. We stayed with you, attaching our spirits to yours, and built this recreation of our home, and when Remus and Sirius died, they managed to find you and, after attaching themselves to you, they joined us in here."

Orion met the dark eyes of his former mentor, and Severus shrugged. "I put a piece of myself inside you the day you freed me of the Dark Mark. You're not a Horcrux, I chose to anchor myself to you in this manner, for your protection. We've kept ourselves hidden until now, because we didn't know what your reaction would be upon finding us here."

"Did you think I'd try and throw you out?" Orion asked with a raised eyebrow, amused when he saw Severus blush slightly.

"No," the former spy replied, "but we weren't sure exactly what you would do."

"Harry, might I say that Severus and I are very grateful for what

you've done for our younger selves," Remus interjected, causing Orion to turn red himself. "Seriously," Remus continued, "you've made our younger selves' lives a lot better than they would have been, and we don't regret it."

Orion glanced at Severus who nodded emphatically. "I fully agree, and while it's a bit odd to look at you and think that you're our student as well as our father, we don't mind."

Orion looked at James and then slyly asked, "How do you think your younger self is going to take the news that his "Uncle Orion," is actually his son?"

James chuckled. "I wouldn't worry about it, what I would worry about is the fact that both he and Severus are going to be competing for Lily in a few years time."

"I won't let them turn into a past version of what happened between me, Ron and Hermione," Orion replied. "Besides, if it does come down to something like that, it will be Lily's choice as to who she has as her boyfriend. I won't interfere with that choice."

"Even if my younger self chooses Severus?" Lily asked.

Orion inclined his head. "Even then."

"By the way, Harry, when are you going to challenge Dumbledore for what he's done to you?" James asked, turning the conversation in a different direction.

Orion scowled. "When I'm ready. I'm not yet ready to let it be known that I'm now Lord Slytherin, nor am I ready to reveal my double Lordship."

"Double Lordship?" James asked. "You won't be Lord Gryffindor until I die, how can you be both Lord Gryffindor and Lord Slytherin now?"

"Charles ceded the title of Lord Gryffindor to me on the understanding that when I die, it reverts back to him, and then passes to you, and then on to my future self like normal," Orion responded. "As for challenging Dumbledore, it would hardly be a fair fight given that he's still under that Unbreakable Vow."

"Harry," Severus said in an exasperated tone, "Slytherins don't care about what's fair or not. You need the Elder Wand to kill Voldemort, and Dumbledore's got it. Challenge him to a duel sometime before you kill Voldemort and get what you need to complete your task."

Orion stared at him silently until Severus dropped his gaze. "I will challenge him when he gives me just cause, and not before," he said firmly.

"I would say he's given you plenty of cause," Sirius spluttered from where he was sitting in a comfortable-looking chair.

Orion shook his head. "Not since he's taken that vow. I have a feeling he'll try and get round it sometime in the next few years, and that way of getting round it will give me the cause I need to challenge him, but I won't force things."

He settled back in his own chair and sighed, rubbing his forehead. "I will say this, I'm glad to know you're with me, even if I can't see you. Do you have any idea what happened at the end of the battle, after I chucked Voldemort out of my head?"

Severus frowned. "Your shields cracked under his assault and he found a way in, you threw him out, and then Fate intervened."

"What do you mean?" Orion half-growled.

Looking very somber, Severus said, "I'm afraid the amount of Legilimency and Occlumency that was bouncing around at the end of

the battle ripped both your mind and Voldemort's wide open and reformed the link between you." He looked uncomfortable as he added, "Unfortunately, the link between you isn't purely mental. It joined your souls together."

Orion's eyes widened and he swallowed hard. "Are you telling me that my soul and Voldemort's are now joined for eternity? Also, what about my Occlumency shields, are they going to be useless now?"

"Not quite," Severus hastened to reassure him. "For one, your Occlumency shields are still strong enough to keep him out, the link can't work unless he gets into your mind, or you get into his. All you have to do is rebuild your shields and the link will be cut off from your end. It won't be dead, just blocked. Your soul won't be joined to his for eternity, when he dies, the link will break, freeing your soul again. The bad news is that, well, you'll die too."

Orion took this news without even a flicker of emotion on his face. "I see," he said calmly.

"How can you be so calm about this?" Sirius demanded.

Orion faced his godfather's spirit and smiled bitterly. "I've always known that Fate would find some way of getting rid of me before my future self's birth. Now I know the manner of my death, and I can accept it. I'll just make sure that Voldemort precedes me." He worked a kink out of his neck and then said, "Besides, I still have a lot of work to do before the final battle."

"Meaning?" Remus demanded, his amber eyes sad and worried.

"Meaning that even though I've destroyed two Horcruxes, there are still four to go, even though we've made plans to retrieve the locket as soon as possible now that the Potions Masters at work have finally come up with an antidote to that blasted potion," Orion said, leaning over and giving Remus a hug.

Sirius shook his head. "Actually, Harry, you've destroyed three Horcruxes now – the ring, the diadem, and Nagini. She was destroyed when Riddle Manor collapsed on top of old Snake-Face, a chunk of falling rock crushed her skull, killing the Horcrux as well."

Orion looked a bit happier when he heard of Nagini's death. "Excellent. When the locket is retrieved and destroyed, which should be as soon as I get out of St. Mungo's, we'll have four dead Horcruxes and only two to go."

"The cup and the diary," James murmured. Orion nodded in response.

"Yes, the cup and the diary, and they're proving the hardest two to find," he murmured.

Severus tapped him on the shoulder and Orion turned to look at him. "Thanks for telling my younger self about Legilimency and beginning his Occlumency training," he said quietly.

Orion grinned. "No problem. I did think about letting you work it out yourself but then I thought that would be a bit mean. How did you cope the first time round?"

Severus shrugged. "Trial and error. I learnt Occlumency mostly via books, and honed my Legilimency talent the same way. Learning it from a proper teacher is the best way to do it though."

He broke off and looked annoyed for a second before saying, "And what was that 'clearing your mind' business all about?"

Orion couldn't help it, he started to laugh, and then he fell off his chair at the glare that Severus was giving him. "I'm sorry, Severus, but really, it was amusing. After all, what was it you told me when you first began my lessons?"

Severus shook his head. "Yes, yes, I get the point. Go work on your shields so you can wake up. It's been several hours and my younger self, along with Remus and James' younger selves, are getting very worried about you."

Orion brought his amusement under control and stood up. He hugged Severus, and then Remus, before walking over to Sirius and hugging him too. Standing in front of James and Lily, he hesitated.

James pulled him into a hug. "Come here, idiot," he said fondly, as Lily joined in the hug. "We are proud of you, you know that don't you," James whispered into Orion's ear. Orion wiped his eyes and nodded, releasing his parents reluctantly.

"I know," he whispered, before leaving the Godric's Hollow recreation and beginning to work on his shields. It took several more hours but finally his shields were up to full strength again. He examined the reformed link with caution, feeling a combination of disgust and dislike as he probed the point of connection, soothing the inflamed end and making sure it didn't hurt. Once the pain had gone, he put his strongest shields around the link, encasing it so that Voldemort couldn't find out anything about him through it.

When he'd finished, he looked around. He wanted to wake up but didn't quite know where to head for in order to do so. Although he was in his own mind and he knew it fairly well, there were still some unexplored portions, which explained why he hadn't found the Godric's Hollow recreation before. Turning around in a circle, he smiled when he saw James waiting for him and walked over to his father.

"The way out is straight ahead," James said quietly, giving Orion one last hug.

"Will I see you again?" Orion asked softly, holding onto his father

tightly.

James brushed a lock of hair back off his son's forehead. "Whenever you need us, we'll be here, son. As for the future, I have a feeling you'll get your wish." He was about to leave when he turned back and said, "Oh, and when you wake up, the best way of handling my father when he's annoyed is to be very apologetic and promise not to do whatever it is that annoyed him ever again."

He then seemingly dissolved and Orion groaned, feeling consciousness returning in a rush. He felt his body lying in the bed, and then felt two lumps on the bed beside him.

Opening his eyes, he found that the two lumps were Severus and Remus, who were sound asleep. Moving his head, he saw Charles and Emma sitting beside his bed. James was curled up at the bottom of the bed, having stubbornly refused to leave.

Smiling wearily, Orion gently tightened his arms around his sons, and moved his foot so that his toes nudged James in the ribs. The three boys woke at the nudges, but when they saw who had nudged them, their eyes widened and they promptly hugged Orion so tightly that he was in danger of falling unconscious again, this time from lack of air.

"Wait," Orion whispered when James would have woken his father. Lifting a finger, Orion wiggled it, and the three Marauders had to muffle their laughter as a large bucket of water upended itself over Charles, waking him up with a shock.

Charles coughed and spluttered, freezing from the unexpected bath, and annoyed about it. Glaring at the boys, he was about to reprimand them for using magic like that when he suddenly realized who had given him the bath.

"Orion?" he said incredulously.

Orion nodded. "Hi," he said softly, swallowing as his grandfather's eyes narrowed. Suddenly, his father's words about placating his grandfather made sense and he held up his hands in a placatory gesture.

"I didn't mean to end up in here," he said, ignoring the startled looks from his sons and his nephew.

"James, Severus, Remus, now that he's woken up, could you please leave us alone," Charles requested, the edge in his voice clear.

"Go on guys, I'm sure you need to get back to school. I'll be back at home soon, and I do need to talk with Charles," Orion said, hugging Severus and Remus tightly, before gently pushing them off the bed. James also got a hug and was then pushed off the bed and out the door. Emma took one look at her husband's face and decided to leave with the boys. Before she did so, however, she leaned down and hugged Orion, whispering, "Good luck. Glad to see you back with us."

Orion watched her leave, and then turned his attention back to Charles, who hadn't stopped glaring at him. He waited, now knowing what Severus and Remus felt like when he used the same tactics prior to reprimanding them. He didn't like it very much.

After a long pause, Charles growled, "What were you thinking!"

Orion's eyes narrowed, and he snapped back, "I was doing what I had to do in order to survive! We had no idea it was an ambush! Voldemort must have been training those lower level Death Eaters for weeks in order to bring them up to the required standard so he could spring the trap, and we fell for it. I lost one of my team on that mission, don't forget!"

Charles leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes, breathing deeply so he could control his temper. It would look very bad if he

killed his grandson now. Opening his eyes again, he caught Orion's gaze with his own and said quietly, "Do you have any idea how much you scared us? Or how Severus and Remus would feel if you had died on that mission? You know the pain of losing a parent, and I cannot believe you would risk putting them through that same pain. I know you were doing your job, but your job does not include engaging the most dangerous Dark Lord the Wizarding World has ever seen in a one on one duel, nor does it include a Legilimency battle with said Dark Lord." His voice had been rising steadily throughout his speech and by the end he was almost yelling again.

Orion's eyes flared with anger, and he sat up straight in the bed. Magic sparked around him as he snarled, "Listen, I'm not going to lie here and let you berate me for doing my job! Yes it was a bad situation but I didn't deliberately engage him in a Legilimency battle, he was the one who attacked me like that, not the other way around! I did what was necessary in order to defend myself, so stop yelling at me!" He stopped, breathing heavily, and then said more quietly, "And if you ever throw my parents' deaths in my face like that again, you will regret it."

Charles sat back in his chair, a small, satisfied, smile on his face. "Good, I was wondering when you were going to fight back." Seeing Orion's shocked look, he smiled and ruffled his grandson's hair.

"Don't worry about it. I trust you're not going to engage Voldemort in a battle again, at least until you've completed your treasure hunt?" He smirked as he added, "I would hate to have to ground you if you did repeat this idiotic stunt."

Orion now gaped at Charles and spluttered, "What! You can't do that!" Regaining control of himself, he sighed and said, "I won't go after Voldemort again until the treasure hunt is complete, but I can't say that I won't fight him if he should come after me." He was silent for a few minutes and then said, "The mission did have one good outcome."

"What's that?" Charles asked, wary of the glint in Orion's eyes.

Leaning back against his pillows, Orion said, "Voldemort will think twice before going against me now that I've revealed that I'm the true Heir of Slytherin. He has also now officially lost half of his Horcruxes, and soon he'll be down to just two. Nagini died when Riddle Manor fell on top of her and Voldemort is nursing a headache that's about the same size of the manor, given that it fell on top of him as well."

"Did you manage to give him any other injuries?" Charles inquired.

Orion sighed and lost his cheerful demeanor. "Yeah, you could say that. Remember what I said about Fate?"

Charles nodded wordlessly, and then he frowned when Orion sighed again and said, "The link between us has reformed. I'm now inextricably tied to Voldemort and there's no way of severing the link short of killing him. Unfortunately, killing him will have a rather lethal side effect."

"What do you mean?" Charles asked, unable to keep a small hint of fear out of his voice.

Orion met his eyes for a minute and then said flatly, "When he dies, I die."

Author Note

Well, here's a nice long chapter for you. I hope you like the end of the battle, and the conversation with the older, spirit versions of the Marauders, Severus, and Lily. I wasn't originally intending to write that but it seemed to fit, plus it ties in with a later chapter that I'm planning. Now you all know how Fate intends to get rid of Orion. I've been working on my original story as well, and I have the first book complete and the second book half done. I'm going to be busy over

the next few weeks making contact with agents and publishers to try and get the ball rolling with regard to publishing my first book. I figure the publishing business is slow enough that I can have the second and third books written before the first is actually released. At least, that's what I'm hoping. I will still keep this story going though, even though I will be splitting my attention between it and my original story.

May the Force be with you

Padawan Lynne

Chapter Twenty Two: Occlumency and Nightmares

James, Remus and Severus returned to Hogwarts rather shaken. Orion's brush with death had opened their eyes to the reality of what was happening outside their safe haven, and although they were happy that Orion had survived, they couldn't help but wonder how many more times he would be able to do that.

Sirius and Lily met them in the Library and sat down with them. "What happened?" Sirius asked.

James slowly related the story, and when he'd finished, Lily and Sirius were both gaping at the three Potters. "Wow," Sirius finally said. "Dueling You-Know-Who and surviving to talk about it, that's not something everyone can do."

"Sirius, it's not something to be proud of!" Lily snapped, walking around the table and hugging Severus, before releasing him and hugging Remus and then James. "Is your Dad OK though?" she asked Severus.

Severus shrugged. "He woke up and talked to us for a bit, but then Uncle Charles shooed us out, said he had to talk with Dad." He paused and then frowned. "Did it seem like Uncle Charles was annoyed with Dad?" he asked Remus.

Remus frowned as well. "Yes," he answered. "He had that same look on his face that Dad gets when he's..." he trailed off as realization struck both him and Severus at the same time and then they began to laugh.

"What's funny?" Sirius asked, unable to see why his friends were almost rolling on the floor. Remus recovered first and wiped his eyes. "Sorry," he apologized, letting another small chuckle out. "We just realized that Uncle Charles threw us out so he could yell at Dad without us being there to watch."

"It seems like Uncle Charles treats Dad like an older version of James at times," Severus commented. "It's weird, but funny too."

"Yeah, I wonder what Dad would do if Uncle Orion did something that he told him not to," James said. "Would he ground him do you think?"

"No he wouldn't. Dad's an adult, you can't ground adults," Remus said with a snort. The small group fell silent as they thought about what had happened, and then Lily shook herself out of her contemplative state.

"Are any of you doing anything interesting for Christmas?" she asked.

Severus smiled. "Dad's going to teach me Occlumency," he said with a grin. "He taught me how to clear my mind, and I'm going to practice it so that when Christmas comes, I can do it perfectly."

"What's Occlumency?" James asked.

"It will stop Dumbledore reading our minds," Severus answered.

James looked excited. "Do you think Uncle Orion can teach me too?" he said, looking eagerly at Severus. Severus frowned, and then shook his head. "I don't think so. Besides, won't your Dad know Occlumency? Ask him to teach it to you."

James looked hurt. "Fine," he growled. "I was just asking."

"Sev, he probably does need to learn it too," Lily said softly, putting a hand on his where it was lying on the table. Severus looked up at her with an angry stare. "No. This is supposed to be just between me and Dad, no one else."

"What about me?" Remus asked, confused at his brother's reaction

to James' question about learning Occlumency.

Severus glanced at him and smiled slightly. "Dad said that because you're what you are, your mind is naturally resistant to Legilimency, so you don't need to learn it."

Remus nodded and then got up with a yawn. "I'm off to bed, it's almost curfew," he said and walked out of the library. He met up with James a little way down the corridor. His cousin was still angry, he could sense it, but also hurt as well. Without saying a word, Remus firmly steered James in the direction of Gryffindor Tower. His enhanced hearing picked up the sounds of Lily, Sirius and Severus following them. At the top of the staircase the group came together again and then split after saying goodnight. Severus headed for the dungeons, while the others headed for their own common room.

Once on his own bed, Severus drew his curtains and lay back on the bed. Closing his eyes, he attempted to fall into the same breathing pattern that Orion had taught him only that morning. It was difficult as he was still worried about his father, and he had all his other thoughts and memories swirling around his mind, but eventually he managed it. Although only able to hold the calm, clear state of mind for a few minutes, he fell asleep with a satisfied smile on his face. Up in Gryffindor Tower, James was still awake, long after Sirius and Remus, along with Peter Pettigrew and Frank Longbottom, had gone to sleep. He was still hurt over Severus' blunt rejection of his wish to learn the same thing as he was learning. He didn't know why Severus was being so possessive of his father; it wasn't like James was going to steal him or anything. Rolling over in bed, he closed his eyes, hoping that sleep would come soon.

Christmas rolled around and the Marauders eagerly boarded the train to King's Cross. Severus and James had only partially resolved their dispute over the Occlumency issue so their relationship was noticeably cooler than usual, which made Sirius and Lily uncomfortable. Remus took no notice of it, having got his head stuck

in a book on mind magic. He might not need to learn it, but it was always useful to know the theory.

When they got to King's Cross, they disembarked and started looking for their parents. Lily headed for the barrier, knowing that her parents would be outside, while Sirius waved goodbye to the three Potters and trudged over to his parents, not looking very enthusiastic as his mother immediately started haranguing him for being in Gryffindor and his little brother smirked at him the entire time.

"Remus! Severus!" a voice called from near one of the pillars. The steam from the train cleared and the two boys saw Orion standing there, smiling at them. Forgetting any sense of decorum, they rushed at him and grabbed him in a tight hug, laughing as he hugged them back. Nearby, James was being hugged by his parents as well. He spotted Severus and glared at him, to which Severus responded with his own glare.

Spotting the glares, Orion and Charles looked at each other and then shrugged. Unless either of their children asked for help, they'd let the boys sort it out on their own. They then used Portkeys to get to their respective homes, Charles, Emma and James going to Potter Manor, while Orion, Remus and Severus went to Marauder Manor.

Landing in their customary heap on the floor, Orion pulled himself up with a groan. Noticing his sons' worried looks he grinned and said, "I'm fine, the Healers gave me a clean bill of health. I just wasn't prepared to have you two landing on top of me like that. You're a lot heavier than you used to be."

Reassured, Severus and Remus grinned back and then raced upstairs to put their trunks in their rooms. They would stay the whole Christmas break and go back when it was time to start school again. Left downstairs, Orion chuckled and moved into the living room, where Noddy had left three mugs of hot chocolate. Picking one of them up, he paused to savor the smell rising from the mug before

taking a sip.

Remus and Severus soon joined him, and they spent an enjoyable half hour relaxing on the couch and reconnecting with each other. Orion quizzed the boys on how their schoolwork was going, while they took the opportunity to pelt him with questions about how his job was going. They also expressed how scared they'd been when Charles and Emma had arrived in Dumbledore's office and Orion smiled rather ruefully.

"Sorry about that, I really didn't mean to get into that fight. We were planning an ambush and were instead ambushed ourselves. Not every plan will work the way you expect it to."

"Did Uncle Charles really tell you off Dad?" Severus asked. He was dying of curiosity. Orion noticed and laughed. "What makes you think he told me off?" he responded.

"Because he had the same look on his face that you get when you're about to tell us off," Remus said with a grin.

Orion shook his head and laughed. "OK, you've got me there. Yes, he did tell me off. He was as worried about me as you were, and he told me that quite strongly. We're fine now though, OK."

Remus and Severus nodded, sensing that they wouldn't get any more out of their father on that topic, and to be fair, it was a rather personal topic to talk about. They switched their attention to other topics and the conversation carried on until Noddy came in to inform them that it was dinner time.

The next morning, Remus went out to fly on his broom as it was a clear day. Choosing to stay indoors, Severus and Orion settled on the floor in the lounge for Severus' first proper Occlumency lesson.

"Right, have you been practicing the meditation technique I taught

you?" Orion asked, keeping his voice calm. He'd taught colleagues before, but this was his son and he didn't want to stuff it up.

Severus nodded eagerly. "Yes, and I think I'm getting better. It takes less time to clear my mind now," he reported, grinning at his success. Orion grinned back, pleased that Severus was succeeding, it wasn't an easy step to master as he knew from his own experience.

"That's good. OK, now I want you to clear your mind, and then I'm going to cast the Legilimens spell and enter your mind. I won't look at anything; I'm just going to sit there, so you're aware of my presence. Alright?"

Severus nodded, his eyes shut tightly as he concentrated. Orion cleared his own mind and then cast the spell, saying it out loud so Severus could hear it.

"Legilimens!"

He carefully entered his son's mind, knowing that too much pressure, too soon, could damage it, and he didn't want that. Once inside, he sat there, knowing that Severus could feel his presence, but also knowing that his son wasn't quite sure what to do next. After a few minutes he felt Severus' mind pushing against his and allowed himself to be pushed out.

Opening his eyes, which he'd closed at some point during the exercise, Orion was greeted by Severus staring uncertainly at him. "Did I do it right?" he asked.

Orion smiled at him. "Yes, you did exactly what you should have done. Could you feel me sitting there?"

Severus nodded. "Yes. I could feel that it was you, but you weren't supposed to be in my mind, so I pushed you out. I thought it would be harder though."

"It will be if you're trying to push out someone who's looking through your memories or is otherwise determined to stay in your mind," Orion replied, giving Severus a hug and then sitting back in his original position. "It can be very difficult to push an attacker out of your mind if they're bringing up all your worst memories, because you see them as they do, and it can wreck your concentration."

"Bringing up memories?" Severus asked.

Orion nodded. "Yes. A Legilimens can look for any memory they want when they enter someone's mind. They can look for happy memories, sad memories, recent or old. I'll show you, but I'll look for happy memories. Once I start looking at the memories, try and push me out."

Severus looked a bit uncertain at this but he supposed this was where the trust part came in and he did trust his father. Closing his eyes he cleared his mind, achieving it with some difficulty as he was getting tired, and then felt the odd sensation of his father's mental presence entering his mind. He waited, and then he saw various memories flash across his mind.

His first meeting with Lily, Orion adopting him, his ninth birthday, the memories kept coming. Severus suddenly remembered what he was supposed to do, and tried to push his father out of his mind. He felt his father give way and pushed harder and harder until Orion had retreated.

Opening their eyes, father and son looked at each other. Severus looked exhausted from the effort he'd used to push his father out of his mind, while Orion was breathing slightly harder than normal. "How was that?" Orion said as he raised an eyebrow.

"Hard. I wanted to see more," Severus responded.

"Hmm. May I try searching for unhappy memories? You might feel more inclined to shove me out then," Orion suggested. He didn't think that Severus was up for too much more, it was only the first lesson and he'd gone further than he'd intended already, but he wanted to let Severus direct the pace as much as possible.

"Um, I'm really tired, Dad. Can we work on building shields, rather than repelling invasions?" Severus asked. He didn't want his father seeing all his bad memories. Fortunately, Orion seemed to understand, because he nodded and switched to shield construction immediately.

"That's fine," Orion said calmly. He eyed Severus for a minute and looked concerned as he asked, "Are you sure you're OK to continue?"

Severus blinked and then nodded vigorously. Orion shrugged and said, "OK. The first step towards constructing mental shields is to properly organize your mind. This means first clearing your mind and then starting to sort through your memories. Put them in categories, and then put each category in a specific section of your mind."

"How long will that take?" Severus asked. "I've got a lot of memories."

Orion smiled. "It will take a while, Sev. Work out what categories you want your memories to be in first. And don't be surprised if it takes several weeks or even months to finish. The good news is that after the initial sorting is done, any new memories that come along can be automatically sorted each day."

"And once the memories are sorted, the shields can be built," Severus said, understanding what Orion was trying to teach him.

Orion smiled at him. "Exactly. Do you think you'll be OK here for a while?" Severus nodded, his eyes firmly shut, concentrating. Orion

ruffled his hair and then got up. "Good. I'll go check on Remus. Don't exhaust yourself; your memories won't disappear if you can't manage a lot today."

Severus barely heard him; he was so engrossed in his new task. Orion shook his head slightly, if there was one thing he'd learnt about Severus in the three years that they'd been a family, it was that his son was very focused, and once he started something, he didn't like to stop until it was done. Walking outside, he saw Remus practicing a Wronski Feint and his heart almost stopped in his chest as Remus pulled up his broom only a few inches from the ground.

"Hi, Dad. Did you see that?" Remus called out.

"I did, and you almost gave me a heart attack," Orion responded once his voice had started working again. From within his mind, he thought he heard a chuckle, but he dismissed it. He saw his parents, godfather, uncle and mentor in his dreams, he didn't need to start hearing their voices when he was awake as well.

After giving Remus a few pointers he walked back inside to find Severus looking through a copy of *A Beginner's Guide to Occlumency: The Art of Keeping Nosy Wizards out of Your Mind*. Severus turned when he heard footsteps behind him and sighed.

"I couldn't get more than one memory, Dad. I'm more tired than I thought," he admitted, hating to admit when he'd failed, even though it was only a failure from his point of view. Orion pulled him into a hug, smiling when he felt Severus yawn.

"It is tiring the first few times. That's why I told you not to overexert yourself. The mind is a very delicate thing, and not to be treated roughly. When I started doing this, I took several months to fully sort my memories."

"How old were you?" Severus mumbled, almost asleep on his feet.

The mental effort it took to push his father out of his mind and then to even begin to sort memories had sapped his energy.

Orion smiled down at him. "Seventeen."

Severus nodded. "Oh. Were you," he yawned again, "this tired when you began?"

Orion sat down on the couch and let Severus curl into his side. "The first few times, yes, but remember, I was also six years older than you were, so the effects weren't as pronounced as they are with you."

Orion raised an eyebrow when he didn't receive a reply, and then he heard a soft snore. Chuckling quietly he summoned a blanket and tucked it round the sleeping child, content for now to let Severus use him as a pillow. He laid his head against the back of the couch and closed his eyes, intending to meditate for a while, but he fell asleep as well.

He found himself back in Godric's Hollow, surrounded by the older version of his family. James and Lily hugged him, followed by Sirius, and then Remus and Severus. He sank down onto the couch and sighed.

"Are you trying to make me feel ashamed of myself?" Severus demanded once he'd settled himself next to Orion, on his left hand side.

Orion glanced sideways at him. "What do you mean? The answer is no by the way, but still, I'm not sure what you're getting at."

Severus huffed. "You know perfectly well what I'm getting at. You're being a lot kinder to my younger self than I ever was to you, and you know it."

Orion now growled slightly. "You might have started out the wrong

way, but you eventually taught me properly. Stop looking for hidden motives in my actions."

Severus' only reply to that was a snort. "Fine. Are you prepared for any potential fall out from later lessons?"

"I assume you mean potential nightmares? Yes, I'm ready," Orion said shortly. He felt an arm settle round his shoulders and leaned into it with a sigh. "Sorry, I didn't mean to snap," he murmured, knowing that it was Severus who was hugging him.

"No need to apologise," the older version of his son muttered. "Just be careful. His childhood before you wasn't nice."

Orion snorted. "I know that, Sev, and I can help him through it." He shivered. "I just hope that I can be as much help to him as you were to me."

He felt more arms go round him and realized that everyone in the house was hugging him. "You will," Remus murmured in one ear, while Lily said softly in the other, "You'll be fine. You're a great father, don't doubt yourself."

Smiling, Orion closed his eyes and abruptly vanished from the house, waking up back in Marauder Manor. He looked around; checking the clock to see how much time had passed. Only half an hour had gone by. Looking down, he saw that Severus had obviously woken up before him, and, Orion saw with amusement, had carefully tucked the blanket round him before leaving.

"Hi guys," he said, seeing Remus' and Severus' heads looking in the window. The boys grinned and entered through the same window, causing Orion to wince as they knocked over several items that had been on the windowsill beneath it.

"Hi, Dad. Enjoy the nap?" Remus asked with a grin.

"Yes I did thanks. Are you two OK?" Orion responded, wondering what his two Marauders had been up to while he'd been asleep. Remus and Severus looked at each other and then said, "Uncle Charles called, and he said that he wants to talk to you. He didn't seem happy – are you in trouble again?" Remus asked, his eyes narrowing in a way that Orion recognized from the young werewolf's older self.

"No, I'm not, imp. We discovered something about what happened at the end of the duel between me and Voldemort that upset him. He probably wants to discuss that," Orion yawned, stretching his arms above his head. "If you're not doing anything, might I suggest playing a game or something while I talk with your uncle? Noddy will have lunch organized soon, I'm sure."

Remus and Severus looked at each other and then shrugged. They went their separate ways, Remus to continue reading his Occlumency book, while Severus continued his Occlumency practice, clearing his mind and holding the clear, calm state as long as he could. He didn't bother with sorting his memories; he wanted to get better at clearing his mind before he tried that. He noticed that several memories were floating around and he attempted to push them into proper categories as part of clearing his mind though.

The rest of the day passed relatively lazily. After talking with Charles, Orion read a book, made notes on Death Eater attacks, trying to predict where they'd strike next, and cautiously prodding the link he once again shared with Voldemort. He didn't do too much exploration of the link, being able to feel Voldemort's emotions were enough. The Dark Lord had vanished after the destruction of Riddle Manor but Orion knew he wasn't dead, and he still had his body, even though it had to be rather battered after having a mansion fall on top of it.

Remus and Severus had also busied themselves with reading. The small family was so engrossed in what they were doing that they

were startled when Noddy informed them that it was dinner time. Orion was amused when both his sons brought their current books to the table and he gently reminded them that the table was for eating at, not reading at. This brought embarrassed looks from both young wizards and the books were quickly put back in the lounge.

When Remus and Severus finally went to bed around nine, Orion discreetly put a monitoring charm on Severus' room. He didn't think that Severus had delved deeply enough into his memories to have any effect but he remembered what his son's older self had said to him when he was seventeen, that buried memories have a habit of coming to the forefront of the mind at the most inconvenient times. If Severus were to have a nightmare that night, Orion wanted to know about it.

At three in the morning, Orion's monitoring charm went off. He rolled out of bed, pulled his dressing gown around himself, glad that he always wore pyjama trousers to bed for decency as it saved time with dressing, and made his way to Severus' room. Pushing open the door, his heart clenched in his chest. Severus was thrashing around in bed, the sheets and duvet half on the floor. Orion stepped into the room, and passed a magical barrier. He frowned; he hadn't put a silencing spell on the room. His eyes were drawn to Severus and he understood. Severus hadn't wanted to disturb either him or Remus so he'd unconsciously put it up using wandless magic. It was a demonstration of the power that Severus had within him, but also worrying. Orion didn't want him to hide his problems, he wanted to help him.

Deciding that he'd spent enough time watching, Orion walked over to the bed. He cautiously put a hand on Severus' shoulder. "Sev? Severus, it's me. Wake up, you're having a nightmare. Come on, Sev, wake up," he said softly but insistently.

Severus' eyes snapped open and he gasped, shooting out of the bed and scrambling to get away from Orion. "No, father, please, I'll be

good," he begged, sounding completely panicked.

Orion growled inwardly, Severus wasn't fully awake, that much was clear, as his son would never have mistaken him for Tobias had he been fully aware of where he was. Sighing, he walked over to the trembling boy and crouched down, trying to appear non-threatening.

"Severus, Sev, look at me," he murmured, pitching his voice low, making it calm and soothing. Severus' wild-eyed look faded as he listened to the low murmur and he visibly calmed. Orion gently pulled him forward, and while Severus tensed, he seemed to realize that Tobias wasn't there. Orion was able to sit on the floor with his back against the bed and draw Severus into his arms, still soothing him.

Several minutes passed and then Severus blinked and seemed to become aware of where he was. "Dad?" he said in a shaky voice. Orion tightened his hold and Severus relaxed fully against him. "Dad, I, why are you here? Why are we on the floor?"

Orion gently carded his fingers through his son's sweat-soaked and messy hair. "You had a nightmare, Sev. When I tried to wake you, you opened your eyes but you weren't fully awake, I think. I calmed you down and then brought you back over here."

"I, I thought you were Tobias," Severus muttered, sounding embarrassed and deeply upset at having mistaken Orion for his former abuser. The gentle hand that was still brushing his hair never stopped though, so Severus guessed that his father wasn't too upset about that.

"It's understandable, Sev. You were still caught up in the nightmare, so you thought I was just another part of it. It's OK. You're safe here," Orion murmured in response, having felt his son stiffen as he confessed to his mistake. Severus slowly relaxed at his response, and then tightened his stranglehold on Orion's neck, trying to burrow further into his father's shoulder. "I haven't had nightmares for years

though, why now?" he said when he'd recovered his composure enough to not stutter through the question.

Severus felt himself being shifted so he was sitting on his father's lap in a more comfortable position. Orion was considering how best to answer the question, for it had to be answered. Finally he said, "The mind can be a tricky thing. When you experience something horrible and traumatic, like what Tobias did to you, the mind can choose to deliberately forget what happened, in order to allow you to behave normally. When you begin to learn Occlumency, these buried memories, for lack of a better term, come back so they can be dealt with. Frequently, they return as nightmares, like what you experienced tonight."

"Do you have experience with this?" Severus questioned, only realizing after he'd asked the question how personal it was.

Orion sighed. "Yes, I do. When I was seventeen, I started to learn to organize my memories properly. All the memories of my treatment at the hands of my relatives came back in a rush, including really bad memories that I didn't know I'd had. I had nightmares too, and my Occlumency teacher helped me with it."

"How?"

"The first time it happened, he did something a lot like what I'm doing now. He woke me up from the nightmare, held me, comforted me, and then spent the night with me in his animagus form. I woke up the next morning cuddled up to him like he was a living, breathing, cuddly toy."

Severus gave a watery laugh at the image and Orion smiled. "Yes, it was funny. I was rather embarrassed that I'd cuddled up to him like that, but he informed me that if he hadn't wanted to be there, he wouldn't have been. The next day, we went into my mind together, and faced all the bad memories. I still had nightmares after that, but

my teacher was always there to wake me up and hold me while I recovered."

"Can you stay with me?" was the next thing Severus asked, struggling to absorb the fact that his father had gone through the same experience with regard to nightmares. He felt his father's arms tighten around him once more and then a kiss was dropped onto the top of his head. "Certainly. Would you prefer me as I am now, or in one of my animagus forms?" Orion questioned.

"Could you transform into Leo?" was the reply.

Orion nodded. "Of course. Do you want to remain in here?"

Severus shook his head, not wanting to remain in his room that night. He would return the next night but for now, he needed to remain close to his father. Orion didn't bat an eye at his son's wish to stay with him, and carried him to his own room, laying him in the bed and covering him up. Then he transformed into Leo and jumped onto the bed, settling beside Severus, who wrapped a hand in his mane, holding the handful of hair tightly. Leo settled one foreleg over Severus' body and closed his eyes after making sure that Severus was asleep once more.

There were no more nightmares that night, for either of them.

Author Note

This chapter was a really tough one to write for some reason. Hopefully I haven't stuffed up too much with the Occlumency explanations and the part about memories. Thanks for all the reviews, and for those of you that think Orion dying with Voldemort is a bit cliché, yes it is, but it's there for a good reason, one that will be explained later. Thanks for reading.

Padawan Lynne

Chapter Twenty-Three: Facing the Past: Part One

Severus woke up the next morning feeling very comfortable and lazy. Opening his eyes, he saw Leo lying beside him, and then, as he looked around, he saw that he was in his father's room, rather than his own. The memory of why he had ended up in his father's room with Leo sleeping beside him abruptly rose up and he blushed hotly. Groaning, he buried his head into the pillow, utterly humiliated that he'd had to have his father act as a living cuddly toy for him for the rest of the night.

The heavy weight that he'd noticed lying across his torso was revealed as Leo's right foreleg, and Severus squirmed out from under it, getting off the bed quietly. He needed to go to the toilet, but then he'd return. Leo opened an eye as he felt his foreleg move, and looked sleepily at the young wizard. Quickly explaining why he'd got out of bed, Severus was amused as the lion form of his father yawned and went back to sleep.

Finishing in the bathroom, Severus returned to Orion's bedroom and scrambled up on the bed, cuddling up to Leo, who draped the same leg over him again seemingly not disturbed that Severus had wrapped his hands in his mane as he was drifting off to sleep again.

Half an hour later, Severus felt himself being gently shaken awake. He opened his eyes slowly and realized that his father had obviously changed back at some point because he was sitting on the bed, wrapped in his dressing gown.

"Good morning, Severus," Orion said quietly. "Are you feeling OK?"

Severus searched his feelings, and then nodded, replying softly, "I think so, Dad. Thanks, for last night, I mean."

Orion ran a hand through his son's sleep-mussed hair. "It's perfectly fine, Sev. I'll be here whenever you need to talk, and I don't just mean

about your memories, I mean about anything. Even when you're an adult, if you need to talk, I'll be here. OK?"

Severus nodded, believing his father because he heard the sincerity in the words that he spoke. He rolled out of the bed and then realized that he was still in his pyjamas. Blushing a bit, he quickly made his way to his own room and got dressed. When he got back, Orion had also dressed and met him at the door.

"Ready for breakfast," the older wizard said lightly. Severus nodded as his stomach rumbled loudly. Orion chuckled at the sound and patted Severus' shoulder. "It sounds like your stomach agrees with me. Where's your brother?"

"Probably still asleep," Severus said with a shrug. Orion checked the time – it was ten am – and then smiled. "We'll keep some for him, if he wants to sleep then let him."

Severus grinned, and threw his leg over the banister. With a cheeky smile he slid down the banister, ignoring Orion's half-hearted protest of "Severus Damien Potter, you could get hurt!" Shaking his head, Orion decided to give Severus a show and jumped on top of the other banister. With a smirk, he balanced on one foot, and slid down, jumping off at the end.

"If I catch you trying that, you're grounded," he said as he walked past a gaping Severus and into the dining room, where Noddy had already laid out breakfast, kept hot with warming charms. Sitting down, Orion and Severus had a quiet conversation over breakfast about the previous night's events and then Severus asked, "Dad, you know what you said about your teacher going into your mind with you to face your bad memories?"

Orion chewed a piece of bacon, swallowed some orange juice and then replied, "Yes. Do you want me to do the same?"

Severus nodded. "The bad memories are the ones from my childhood, which I should sort first, so they're dealt with and then they won't interfere later. Can we?"

"Do you want to do it now? It's only a few days till Christmas," Orion said, concerned that Severus might be trying to emulate him too much. Severus was still an eleven-year-old boy, no matter how old he tried to act at times, and Orion was worried that he was trying to do too much, too soon.

His son shook his head earnestly, his eyes locked with Orion's, his expression both pleading and determined. "Yes, Dad. I need to do this; I don't want to have nightmares anymore."

"You might have nightmares anyway," Orion pointed out, wanting to be sure that Severus understood what he was getting into. Severus closed his eyes on hearing that, and then opened them again, somehow managing to pour even more determination into them. Orion sighed when he saw that gaze; Severus wouldn't allow himself to be deterred now.

"OK, we'll start after breakfast. First, though, I want your room tidy," he said firmly, getting up and heading for the stairs, intending to wake Remus. Severus groaned at hearing the order to tidy his room but a warning look from Orion had him trudging up the stairs to do as requested.

Poking his head into Remus' room, Orion frowned when he saw that it was empty and the bed wasn't made. He did a quick magical sweep of the room, finding that Remus wasn't hiding anywhere; he was, quite simply, not there.

Going into Severus' room, he stopped as a cauldron sailed past his head. "Severus, have you seen Remus this morning?" he asked, dodging as a stirring ladle followed the same path as the cauldron. Severus poked his head out of his closet and tilted his head to one side.

"No I haven't. Isn't he still asleep?"

"No, his room is empty and his bed isn't made. It looks as though he got up very early this morning, but why?" Orion mused before he turned and went downstairs to place a Floo call to Charles. Perhaps he knew where Orion's missing cub was.

Charles was awake when Orion Flooed him, although he was still in his dressing gown. "Orion, good to see you. How are your two menaces?" he said cheerfully.

Orion frowned. "Severus is OK, Charles, but I'd be a lot happier if I knew where Remus was. He isn't with you?"

Charles was now frowning as well. "I'm sorry, Orion, but he's not. Is his bed not slept in?"

"It's not made— it looks as though he either got up early, or," Orion trailed off as a thought wound through his mind.

"Or," Charles prompted.

"Or he never slept in it last night," Orion finished. "Charles, you don't think? I mean, he was with me since I picked them up from the train, I thought the wards,"

"Orion, calm down," Charles interrupted. "He could simply have gone to one of his other friends' places early this morning and forgotten to leave a note. Don't go looking for trouble where it may not exist."

Orion breathed out and slowly calmed down. "If what you say is true, then he's a lot of trouble," he finally growled. Charles chuckled and replied, "As well he should be, but let's not jump to conclusions. Just calm down and things will turn out OK. If he's not back within a few hours, then you can call in the Aurors, but not yet."

Orion sighed and nodded, pulling back and ending the Floo call. With another sigh, he stood up to get more Floo powder. As he was turning round, the fireplace flared up. Orion whipped back to face the grate, wand in hand. He found himself aiming his wand at a very startled Remus.

Putting the wand away, Orion took two steps forward, pulled Remus from the fireplace and wrapped him in a tight hug before pushing him back and glaring at him. "Where have you been!" he growled; his relief at the fact that Remus was safe and unhurt making the question sharper than it would normally be.

Remus flinched a bit at the growl and then answered, "With Lily. We were studying Occlumency together early this morning; I had breakfast at her house."

Orion shook his head. "I hope you thanked her parents properly." Remus nodded in reply and he continued, "Next time you want to go round to your friend's house early in the morning, either wake me up and tell me, or leave a note somewhere. I was almost ready to send out a search party!"

Remus looked taken aback at this information and Orion softened his tone a bit. "Remus, when I saw that your room was empty and your bed wasn't made, I panicked. I didn't know what to think, but one of the thoughts that ran through my head was that someone had managed to kidnap you right from under my nose. I was scared."

"Sorry, Dad," Remus said, looking ashamed as he realized how things must have looked to his father. "I'll leave a note next time," he promised. Orion hugged him again, the hug as tight as the earlier one had been. "See that you do," he said before letting go.

"Now that the excitement's over, do you have any other plans for today?"

Remus shook his head. "Not really. Why?"

"Well, Severus and I were going to do some more Occlumency study, unfortunately, it leaves you at a loose end. I don't want to seem like I'm ignoring you - ,"

" – you're not," Remus interrupted. "I knew that you were teaching Severus how to do Occlumency, James was quite put out about it,"

Orion's eyes narrowed as a gasp came from behind them, followed by Severus yelling, "You shouldn't have told him!" Orion turned round and arched an eyebrow. "Shouldn't have told me what?" he asked mildly. "Am I about to find out the reason why you and James seem to be less than best friends at present?"

Severus scowled at Remus as he came further into the room. "He wanted you to teach him Occlumency too, so I told him that Uncle Charles probably knows it and he can learn from his own father," he muttered.

Orion had to bite the inside of his cheek to quell the inappropriate laughter that welled up inside him. "I see," he said, crossing his arms. "What did you tell him Occlumency was, exactly?"

Severus looked up, and then said, "I said that it was a way of keeping Dumbledore out of our heads."

"Which is why he wanted to learn it I'll bet," was Orion's response. Seeing Severus' confused expression, he sat down on the couch and patted the seat beside him. After a minute, Severus sat next to him and leaned into the hug. Remus sat on Orion's other side and leaned against his father as well.

"Severus, may I see what happened between you and James?" Orion asked.

"Why? Do you not trust me?" Severus asked suspiciously.

Orion bit back a sigh and said, "I do trust you, but being able to view the memory myself means that I have a clearer picture of what happened, so I can then give you the best advice on what to do next."

"Oh," was all the response that Orion got for a few minutes until Severus looked up at him and said, "OK. What do I do?"

"Just think very strongly about what happened, and I'll find the memory," Orion said, slipping into Severus' mind easily. He found the memory immediately and watched it through to its conclusion, at which point he felt Severus pushing him out, and quite strongly too, he noted with surprise as well as a small amount of pride.

"Well," he said when he'd got his bearings back, "I can tell you why James thought that I could teach him as well. The way you explained it is where the misunderstanding came in. He thought that if I was teaching you then why couldn't he join in, and your rejection of his idea hurt and annoyed him. If you'd told him that you were learning it in order to block everyone else's thoughts from intruding into your own, then he would have understood it as something that you were learning because you had to, and you weren't learning it just for fun."

There was silence for a while and then Severus said, "I thought you told me not to tell people about my Legilimency ability though?"

Orion shrugged. "I said don't tell everyone. I didn't say don't tell your friends. If you'd told him that you were learning Occlumency in order to learn to control your Legilimency ability then he would have seen why I was only teaching you rather than anyone who wanted to learn."

Severus looked down at his hands for a bit before he looked up again and said with a sigh, "I've been an idiot, haven't I."

"I wouldn't say that," Orion disagreed, "but I would say that you made a mistake with how you presented the Occlumency idea. To him, it was something that you were learning and he wasn't. Therefore, he wanted to learn it too. If you explain why you're studying it, he should hopefully understand."

"Was Lily right though, do the others need to learn it?"

"In time, perhaps, but not right now," Orion replied. "If Dumbledore snoops around in your head, all he'll get is vague suspicions on who I really am, and little facts that I've told you about my childhood, which aren't really helpful to him. That's part of the reason why I've told you so little – I didn't trust him not to keep his nose out of your minds."

"But won't he know when you tell us in a few years?" Remus asked.

Orion smiled grimly. "By that time it won't matter if he knows or not, because the need for secrecy will have disappeared."

"Why don't you like him, Dad? He's the Headmaster, wasn't he at Hogwarts in the future?" Severus questioned, frowning as he tried to fit the various pieces of the puzzle about his father together and finding that there were too many missing pieces yet.

"He was my Headmaster, yes, but he and I, well, we had a falling out in my seventh year, when I discovered that he'd done a lot of bad things to me when I was young. This was a few weeks after my Potions professor turned from being a disliked teacher into a trusted mentor to me. Dumbledore didn't like a member of his staff protecting one of the students from him and he threatened my mentor with Azkaban, which led to a huge fight between me and Dumbledore."

"Why would he threaten the professor with Azkaban though?" Severus asked. He was rather startled when Orion smiled sadly at him and replied, "Because he was a Death Eater spy. He joined the

Death Eaters at a young age, but realized within a month that he'd made a horrible mistake. He turned from Voldemort but because you can't just hand in your resignation to the Dark Lord, he became a spy for the Light and saved a lot of lives over the course of the rest of that war and the second as well."

"But Dumbledore had to know that he was on the good side," Severus protested, shocked. Remus nodded, equally shocked but remaining silent. Orion shook his head. "He did, and it was only on his word that my mentor escaped Azkaban at the end of the war. However, Dumbledore never let him forget it, and held it over him, reminding him of it whenever he disagreed with Dumbledore's decisions. I'm getting off the point though. The point is that most people considered him a Death Eater because of the Mark on his arm, they didn't want to know that he was a spy, that he was a good wizard who was braver than most of the entire Wizarding World's population put together because he constantly risked his life every time he answered Voldemort's call. I freed him of the Mark when Voldemort found out about him being a spy, but Dumbledore continued to make life difficult for us."

"You really liked him didn't you, Dad," Remus said softly. Orion raised an eyebrow questioningly and Remus elaborated, "Your potions teacher. You said that neither of you liked each other when you were younger, but things must have changed for you to speak of him like you just did."

Orion nodded, and hugged both his children tightly. "Yes, it did. To most people we still acted like we hated each other, but in private we dropped the act. He told me once, after one of our training sessions, – he was giving me private tuition in advanced Defence Against the Dark Arts as well as some tuition in the Dark Arts themselves – that despite the hatred between him and my father, if he could have taken me in when I was orphaned, he would have done. That, more than anything, told me what sort of man he truly was, and I felt rather ashamed of myself for automatically making him the villain during my

first few Hogwarts years."

"He understood though, right?" The question came from Severus, and Orion smirked slightly and ruffled his hair as he replied, "Of course. In his own unique manner, he informed me that I was too young at the time to appreciate the concept that you don't necessarily have to like someone in order to protect them. Then he glared at me and said that his job would have been a lot easier if I'd just followed the rules like everyone else."

Orion sighed, and stared at the opposite wall of the lounge, remaining silent for a few moments before he finished with, "This all happened during my last year at Hogwarts, although our attitudes towards each other started to change in the second half of my fifth year and continued through my sixth year. When I lost my last links to my family, he stepped in and became like a surrogate father to me. I found nutrient potions by my plate at meals, anti-headache and dreamless sleep potions on my bedside table at night, we spent the weekends doing extra Defence training as well as talking about everything that I couldn't tell my friends or Professor McGonagall. He also spent several days without sleep while he and Madam Pomfrey worked together to save my life when my ex-friend "accidentally" poisoned me."

"Accidentally poisoned you!" came twin yelps from either side of him. "How did he manage that?" Severus asked, shocked.

Orion sighed. "I happen to be very allergic to wolfsbane. That was discovered when I was helping my mentor with a very tricky potion that used wolfsbane as a main ingredient. I got a tiny amount on my wrist and it flared up immediately. After I got a potion from Madam Pomfrey to deal with the reaction, I was given some dragonhide gloves which also covered my forearms as well, so I wouldn't come into contact with it. My ex-friend heard about this, and thought that he could induce another allergic reaction and make me sick for a while. Unfortunately, he ended up almost killing me by mistake. He didn't

realise that the reaction would be a lot stronger if more of it was used, and he didn't realise that the method he chose would also make the reaction worse."

"How did he do it?" Remus asked, pressing closer to Orion to hear the answer.

"I was taking a specially formulated Dreamless Sleep potion that my mentor had made for me. It was a formulation which gave the drinker a dreamless sleep, but which wasn't addictive if taken over long periods. It had a rather bitter taste to it normally, so I didn't notice the extra bitterness that the wolfsbane gave it. He'd managed to sneak into my rooms and added ground up wolfsbane to the vial."

"So you didn't think the extra bitterness might have been a cause for suspicion," Severus asked, his tone so similar to the one that his adult counterpart had used that Orion had to chuckle, which just made his son glare at him.

"What's funny, Dad?" Severus asked, annoyed that his father seemed to be laughing at him. Orion chuckled a bit more and then hugged him. "Nothing. Just that the tone you used just now, along with what you said, was so similar to what my mentor said to me when I woke up in the hospital wing that I thought you were channeling him for a minute."

Severus frowned, and Orion smiled at him. "I mean that your tone and your words reminded me very strongly of him just now," he said, and Severus relaxed, knowing that Orion wasn't laughing at him.

"So, what happened between the time you drank the potion and the time you woke up in the hospital wing?" he asked.

"Well, I drank the potion, because I trusted my mentor, and didn't see any reason to be suspicious, and then fell asleep. I was later told that the only reason I hadn't died was because my mentor had put

warning charms on my room to alert him if anything was wrong. If it hadn't been for those charms, I would have died. The wolfsbane reacted very badly with my immune system and it took several hours for my mentor and Madam Pomfrey to stop me from dying, and then several days before I was considered out of danger and on the road to being well again," Orion said quietly.

Silence reigned for several minutes before Remus said, "Did your ex-friend get in trouble? Why did he try to poison you in the first place?"

Orion sighed. "Yes, he got in a lot of trouble. My mentor was the Head of Slytherin, and with me being a Gryffindor, I had the protection of two of the House Heads. My ex friend never stood a chance with both of them yelling at him, or in my mentor's case, hissing at him."

"Your mentor was a Parselmouth?" Severus questioned, frowning.

Orion laughed. "No, he wasn't. His voice was very low and controlled though, and he had several, um, several ways of speaking which indicated what sort of mood he was in. When he was annoyed, he could speak in such a low tone and at such a low volume that it sounded extremely menacing and usually made the recipient quiver with fear."

"Can you give a demonstration?" was the next question.

Orion shook his head, restraining himself from laughing with difficulty. "I'm afraid not. Besides, don't you want the rest of the story?"

Reluctant nods answered him and he shifted on the couch, settling himself in a more comfortable position. "OK. So, with Professor McGonagall roaring at him, metaphorically speaking that is, and my mentor hovering over him threatening all sorts of dire punishments in a tone which left no doubt that he'd love to actually carry them out,

my ex-friend was practically wetting himself. Of course, that was nothing to what his mother did when Professor McGonagall informed her of her son's actions."

Severus and Remus winced at the thought, and then Remus hesitantly said, "What did she do?"

"Sent a Howler which very nearly blew out the windows of the Great Hall," was the reply. "She viewed me as another son, and so wasn't very happy with my ex-friend for what he'd done."

Remus and Severus digested this story in silence, and then Remus looked up, catching his father's gaze. "You never answered why he wanted to poison you in the first place."

"Ah," Orion said, looking uncomfortable. "His sister had done something rather despicable to me. She drugged me with a powerful love potion, to make me fall in love with her. When I discovered what she'd done and broke up with her, he couldn't see that it was her fault, not mine, and wanted revenge on me for supposedly breaking his sister's heart."

"Oh," was all Remus said, looking rather confused. Shaking off the confusion, he said, "Is there anything more to the story?"

"No," Orion replied. "Actually, we've strayed rather far from the original topic. What was it?"

"You were telling us why you didn't like Dumbledore, and it turned into what your relationship with your potions teacher was like in your last year, and then into you almost being killed by your ex-friend," Severus said promptly. Orion nodded distractedly. "OK. Well, all you need to know about why I dislike Dumbledore is that he hurt me badly with a lot of things that I can't tell you about yet, and threatening to have my mentor and surrogate father locked up in Azkaban was only part of it. OK?"

"OK," came a chorus in reply.

"Now that we've cleared that up, it's got fairly late. Lunch time in fact," Orion said in surprise, not quite able to believe that it had taken that long to discuss a memory. Remus and Severus grumbled, wanting to hear more about the future, but Orion stood firm, that was all he was going to reveal for now. As the two boys headed for the dining room, Severus looked back, and found Orion staring at him with a sad expression. He blinked, and then the sadness was gone, leaving Severus to wonder if it had just been a figment of his imagination. All thought of his father's emotional state vanished as soon as he smelt what Noddy had come up with for lunch and he quickly sat down at the table and started serving himself, determined not to let Remus eat everything.

After lunch, Remus asked for, and received, permission to go over to Potter Manor, while Severus and Orion had their postponed Occlumency lesson. As they sat down opposite each other, Orion took hold of one of Severus' hands, gently rubbing circles on the back of it.

"Do you wish to back out? There is no shame in saying yes," he said quietly.

Severus glared at him and once more, Orion was reminded of his future self. "I haven't changed my mind. Honestly, Dad, you seem more nervous about this than me," he snapped back.

"There's no need to snap at me, I'm just trying to help you in any way I can," Orion responded, not letting on that the revelation of one of his own memories had left him a bit out of sorts. Forcefully clearing his mind, he sighed.

"Very well. Let's begin."

They closed their eyes and Severus allowed Orion into his mind, feeling his father's presence settle into his mind a few seconds later. Taking another deep breath, Severus led Orion to the mental door behind which was his childhood memories from before he was adopted.

"Ready?" Orion asked, noticing that Severus' mental self was shivering slightly. Severus leant against his father's own mental self and swallowed. "It has to be done." Taking another breath, he reached for the handle, and opened the door. Shuddering, he stepped forward, passing through the door. Orion sighed again, and stepped through the door as well. He wasn't about to let his son face his past alone.

Author's Note

Well, here's the next chapter. I've been flip-flopping between the allergic reaction scenario and another one which had Orion stuck in his lion animagus form for a month due to a potions accident and I couldn't decide between them which is why this chapter has been delayed. Still, I had to make a decision, and here it is. Updates might be slow for a bit, I am dealing with not only my original story but also some rather rough real life issues at the moment which is sapping my creativity somewhat. I have ideas for the next chapter which will be part two of Facing the Past and will detail some of Sev's childhood memories. We will also see more of the older spirit versions of the Maruaders as they help Harry/Orion to come to terms with not only Sev's past, but also some of the more horrible memories of his own past, dragged up by his reaction to the way that Sev was treated before Harry adopted him. I hope it won't be too long before chapter twenty four is up but if it is a while, just be patient.

May the Force be with you

Padawan Lynne

Chapter Twenty-Four: Facing the Past: Part Two

Orion stepped through the door, and found himself encased in blackness so deep that he thought he'd gone blind for a minute. Looking around, he spotted Severus in the darkness. His son's mental self was giving off a soft white light, as was he, Orion noticed with some surprise. Walking over to Severus, Orion put a hand on his shoulder.

"Where are we?" he asked softly.

"We're still in my mind," Severus answered, his voice quivering slightly. "I shoved all my bad childhood memories from before you adopted me in here, so I wouldn't have to deal with them. It's dark because I don't want to see them."

"And yet you have to," Orion reminded him gently, wrapping an arm round his shoulders. Severus leaned into his father and wrapped his arms round his middle.

"Dad?" he asked.

"Yes, Sev," Orion responded. He kept his voice low and soothing to try and alleviate some of the tension that he could feel in his son.

"I'm scared," Severus admitted, hating himself for feeling scared of memories.

He felt his father hug him and then Orion said, "Remember that I know what you're going through. You feel scared, and you think that you shouldn't be because it's only memories in here and they can't hurt you."

Severus nodded, that was exactly how he was feeling. Orion tightened his hug and then continued, "You're right in that nothing in here can harm you, but it's the emotions associated with the

memories which makes them tough to deal with. Fear, anger, helplessness, they're all emotions which we don't like, and find difficult to handle."

"How did you deal with it, Dad?" was Severus' next question.

Orion thought for a moment and then said, "Can you create things in here? Like, say, a couple of chairs?"

"Conjuring isn't taught until sixth year, Dad," Severus said impatiently.

He was confused when his father gave a short laugh and then said, "Severus, this is your mind. Anything you imagine in here can be made reality."

Orion watched as Severus concentrated for a moment and then a comfortable couch appeared. Severus sat down on it cautiously, testing it. When he was sure it was solid, he looked up at his father and grinned. "Sit down, Dad. It was easier to create a couch so you can still hug me if you want to."

"You mean if you need me to," Orion corrected as he sat down, noticing the Slytherin color scheme of the furniture. Severus blushed faintly but didn't refute the assertion.

"Now, I believe I was about to answer your question," Orion said when they were both comfortably situated on the couch, with Severus cuddled up to Orion. Taking a moment to gather his thoughts, Orion then said quietly, "I didn't deal with it, not really. I used to bottle everything up when I was younger, until I exploded. My mentor, along with Professor McGonagall, and my girlfriend, helped me learn how to express emotion and not bottle it up. What I do remember, is,"

"Is what?" Severus prodded.

"After coming out of examining my bad memories, I was terrified that my Uncle might find his way to Hogwarts," Orion said with a shiver.

Severus felt the shiver and decided that his father could do with some comfort too at that moment. He wrapped his arms round Orion's chest and said, "But he was a Muggle, they can't see Hogwarts."

"That didn't stop me being terrified of the possibility," was the calm response.

Severus thought about this and then said, "Oh. Is that like when I was terrified that Tobias might find some way to take me away from you immediately after the adoption?"

Orion nodded emphatically. "Yes. Exactly like. It's irrational, and completely untrue, but that doesn't stop us being afraid of it. Now, shall we dive into your past before we become completely distracted?"

Severus shivered and then reluctantly nodded. "OK. Um, where do we start?"

"From the beginning," Orion said gently. Severus nodded and curled up into a tight ball, held safely within his father's embrace as the memories started to play out in front of them. Severus tried to bury his head in his father's shoulder but Orion wouldn't let him. Instead he kept an arm round his shoulders and said quietly and firmly, "Face them, Sev, face them and tell yourself that they're only memories, that what happened was horrible, but they can't hurt you now."

Severus gulped and turned back to the horrible parody of a film that was playing in front of him, just in time to see the one that he felt was one of the worst.

"SEVERUS!!" Tobias roared, grabbing his five-year-old son by the shoulders and shaking him violently. The young boy jumped out of reach the moment Tobias let him go, and then curled into a ball, shaking.

"What's wrong?" he asked, trying to sound brave but not managing it. Tobias growled at him and then snapped, "Your bloody obsession with potions, that's what's wrong! Hold this!" He thrust a wand at his terrified son.

Severus slowly reached out and took it. It felt a little warm in his small hands, but only a few sparks came out the end. Tobias' expression darkened and he snatched the wand out of Severus' grasp.

"I knew it!" he sneered. "You're such a weak wizard that you can only produce a few sparks. No wonder you like potions – it's the only magic you can do!"

"Mum says that," Severus began, only to yelp when Tobias slapped him across the face with his hand.

"I don't care what your mother said!" he snapped. "At five years old you should be able to produce more sparks when holding a wand than the pitiful amount you did. Malfoy's son has been having daily bursts of accidental magic – I'm lucky if you show signs of magic once a month."

He stared down at the quivering child, and then said cruelly, "I suppose I could always try and unlock it." Aiming the wand at Severus, he said, "Crucio!"

Severus screamed, the pain overwhelming him until he couldn't think about anything else. He vaguely sensed something moving within him and then a sharp pain accompanied a burst of power which threw Tobias against the wall. With the curse broken, the only sounds in the room were Tobias' harsh breathing as he got himself back

under control, and Severus' quiet sobs as he struggled to understand what had happened.

At the end of that memory, the eleven-year-old Severus had once more buried his head in Orion's chest, but this time, Orion didn't push him back up. He was too busy reassuring him that Tobias was wrong to do what he did, and that Severus was safe, that he'd never be hurt like that again. Severus slowly calmed down as he registered where he was, that he was with his father and he was safe. The memories had stopped after that one as Severus had needed comfort more than he needed to deal with the memories.

"Next one?" he asked, detaching himself from his father with difficulty as this time it was Orion who didn't want to let go.

The older wizard didn't answer for a moment and then he nodded tightly. "Let's get this over with," he muttered. He was still reeling from the fact that Tobias could hate his son enough to be able to use the Cruciatus on him. It was revolting, and Orion felt like he wanted to be sick.

Severus nodded back and restarted the "film". They sat through a lot more memories, most just painful in the fact that they were of neglect and abuse on Tobias' part, the abuse directed at both his wife and his son. There were more instances of the Cruciatus curse being used as a discipline tactic, and as they continued, Orion saw a disturbing pattern. Severus' accidental magic was less accidental and more outbursts of defensive magic, which explained why, when he'd first come to Marauder Manor, it had taken a while before he began to exhibit the more normal pattern of accidental magic happening when he was excited. The memories continued as Severus found the strength to confront each one and deal with it. He couldn't have done it, however, if he hadn't had his father beside him, offering comfort and quiet reassurance whenever he needed it.

The last memory Severus stopped before it even began. He curled

up on the couch and started to shake. Worried, Orion pulled him closer and began to stroke his back.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

Severus shook his head. "I, I don't want to see this one," he said, pulling away from Orion and standing up. Orion stood with him, and moved closer, only to have Severus back away from him. Confused and a little hurt, Orion stopped where he was, and watched as his son paced around in circles in front of him, acting like a caged lion.

'Or a caged panther,' Orion thought with grim amusement, remembering the animagus form of his son's older self. He decided against trying to hug Severus, his son was displaying all the signs of an impending panic attack and he didn't want to provoke him into pushing them both out of his mind. Instead, he held up his hands and said, "Severus, can you tell me why you don't want to view this one?"

Severus turned a sullen glare on him and then snapped, "What's the last memory that I would have had of my mother before you adopted me?"

Orion closed his eyes as realization swept over him. The last memory Severus would have had of his true parents was almost the same as the one he had of his. Opening his eyes he held out his arms.

"Come here," was all he said, but Severus obeyed instantly. Orion just stood there, hugging him tightly. "I understand why you wouldn't want to see it, son. If you truly don't wish to see it now, you don't have to. We can leave it until you're older." He sighed, and then said, "I don't want to force you to do anything you don't want to. Facing death, even in a memory, isn't something I want you to have to do, but it needs to be done at some point."

Severus stiffened. "Why are you saying that?" he snapped, sounding

close to tears.

Orion sighed again and pulled him over to the couch, before gently forcing Severus to sit down with him. "Because when I was fourteen, I was made the key ingredient in a Dark Arts ritual to resurrect a Dark Lord. My friend and I were Portkeyed to the graveyard where the ritual was held, and I saw him die right in front of me without being able to do a thing to stop it."

Severus looked up curiously, both wanting to know more and respecting the fact that what his father was sharing with him was intensely personal. Orion smiled sadly at him and continued, "I had nightmares all the following summer about that incident, nightmares where my friend blamed me for his death, for not doing anything to help him, things like that. I was only fourteen, and it was so quick that neither of us knew what was happening, but that didn't stop me feeling guilty. That wasn't the only memory of death that I had to face later on either."

"What was the other one?" Severus asked before he could stop himself. Orion sighed and then said in a rather choked voice, "I had to face the memory of my parents' deaths at Voldemort's hands. The memory of my father telling my mother to take me and run, that he'd hold Voldemort off. Then my mother pleading with Voldemort not to kill me, to kill her but leave me alone..."

Orion trailed off, and Severus was shocked to see a couple of tears slide down his father's face. Hesitantly, he reached up and wiped them away, earning a watery smile from Orion as he did so.

There was silence for a few minutes and then Severus said determinedly, "If you can deal with that, then, well, I have to deal with mine."

"No, Sev, I didn't tell you that to force you into doing this. You don't have to do it all at once," Orion said hurriedly. He hadn't wanted to

force Severus into facing all his bad memories at once, especially not one that would be so painful for him.

"No, I want to, but I also don't want to," Severus replied, sounding uncertain. Taking a deep breath, he blew it out and said, "Besides, I want you to see it. Maybe having you see it and telling me that it wasn't my fault will help."

"Having people tell you that it wasn't your fault is no good if you don't believe it yourself," Orion said softly, even as he admired Severus' courage. His son might be a Slytherin, but Orion could clearly see the bravery that had helped his older self cope with the job of spying on Voldemort.

Settling back onto the couch, and also snuggling closer into Orion's embrace, Severus started the memory. Having decided to do it, he wasn't going to back down. He curled back up into a ball, and took a deep breath, forcing himself to watch it.

Severus and Eileen were settled on the couch in Snape Manor, discussing what Severus had learnt that day in potions. They had just got to discussing the basic potions ingredients when Tobias came storming in. Both mother and son could smell the alcohol on his breath.

"Eileen!" he snapped, snatching the potions book out of her hands and tearing it in half, ignoring Severus' protest at its destruction. Eileen rose from the couch and drew her wand to repair the book. She'd got halfway through the incantation when Tobias pointed his wand at it and snarled, "Incendio!"

"I told you not to encourage him!" the elder Snape growled at his wife. "All he thinks about is potions – he ought to be learning how to use a wand."

"He's only eight," Eileen protested, while Severus curled up on the

couch, staring at the ashes of his potions book and trying to tune out the argument in front of him. He was drawn back to reality by the sound of a slap.

He watched with wide eyes as his mother sat down on the couch, her hands covering her face. Suddenly angry, Severus jumped off the couch. His mother had protected him from Tobias for years; it was time, in Severus' mind, for him to repay the favor. He didn't think about the fact that he was an eight-year-old boy, whereas Tobias was an adult.

"Leave her alone!" Severus yelled, while Eileen tried to pull him back to the couch.

"Severus, leave it, I'm fine," she insisted.

He turned to her, seeing the large bruise around her left eye and spreading down to her cheek. "No, Mum, he hurt you, and he's hurt me too. He needs to stop," the young boy insisted, reaching up to trace the purpling bruise. "Boys shouldn't hit girls, isn't that what you've always told me?"

Eileen laughed softly. "Yes, Severus, you're right. But sometimes, people don't always behave nicely towards others. Just please, don't challenge your father."

Severus turned a glare on Tobias, who sneered, and then backhanded him across the face. Severus fell to the floor, stunned by the blow, and then he felt himself being hauled up and hit several more times before he was let go and he fell back to the floor. He curled up, trying to protect his head and stomach.

He looked up when he saw a pair of feet come into his vision. He blinked away tears as he saw it was his mother. She was standing in between him and Tobias, and she was shouting at him.

"You could kill Severus if you hit him like that! He's a child for Merlin's sake. Leave him alone!"

Tobias growled and raised his wand as Eileen drew hers, prepared to defend her son, even from his own father. She was unnerved by his cruel smile as he aimed his wand at her.

"Move," he growled.

Eileen readied herself, raising her wand. "No. I won't let you hurt our son any longer."

Tobias growled. "The brat needs to be taught a lesson. Move out of my way and I won't hurt you."

Eileen shook her head and refused to move. She stared at her husband calmly, although her wand never wavered from its steady position, pointed straight at his heart.

"Stupefy!" she said. At point-blank range she was expecting it to hit him.

She was surprised and shocked when he dodged it. Aiming his wand at her, he snarled, "Avada Kedavra!"

"NO!" Severus cried as his mother fell to the floor, motionless. He reached out and shook her, trying to make her respond. "Wake up, Mum," he begged. "Come on, please, wake up!"

He shook her again as Tobias advanced on him. "You're not so brave now are you, you little brat," he sneered. He aimed the wand at his son. "I'm still young enough to have more kids, and I don't want a disappointment like you around anyway. Say hello to your mother."

As he aimed the wand at his son, Severus came to his senses. Suddenly moving in a burst of adrenalin-fueled speed, he tackled

Tobias, forcing the older wizard to drop the wand. Grabbing a handful of Floo powder, he threw it into the fire and yelled, "Marauder Manor!" disappearing in a flash of flame a second later.

The memory ended there, and Severus was once again firmly attached to Orion's chest, sobbing into his shoulder. Orion had enfolded him in a hug and was rocking him back and forth, softly whispering to him that he'd done everything he could possibly have done, and that it wasn't his fault. After Severus had calmed down, he looked up at Orion and whispered, "Can we stop now?"

Orion nodded and Severus made the couch disappear before pushing Orion out of his mind and following him out. When they reconnected with reality, Severus promptly hugged his father again, tears beginning to flow anew as he wrestled with what had happened. After a while the tears stopped and Orion pulled a tissue from his pocket.

Handing it to his son, Orion said, "Did it help?"

Severus sniffled and then blew his nose. Throwing the tissue away, he thought of what he'd just been through. Oddly enough, he found that now he'd faced those memories, he could deal with them as just unpleasant memories. The loss of his mother hurt, and he would always remember her with a bit of sadness, but his childhood with Tobias no longer had the power to emotionally cripple him any longer. As painful as it had been, he realized that his adoptive father was right; it had needed to be done.

"Dad?" he said as he came back from the rubbish bin. Orion looked at him questioningly.

"Yes, Sev," he replied, opening his arms when Severus went to hug him.

"Thanks," Severus said quietly.

Orion ruffled his hair, smirking when Severus pulled back and finger-combed it back to neatness. "That's perfectly fine. Did you have anything in particular you wanted to do now?"

Severus nodded. "First I have to talk to James, regarding the Occlumency misunderstanding, and then, well, could you take me and Remus to Diagon Alley? We need to do Christmas shopping."

"Yes, I'll take you. Go talk to James first though," Orion advised. As Severus raced to the fireplace, Orion took the time to center himself and reinforce his shields around his own worst memories. Although he'd dealt with them years earlier, there was one yet that he hadn't dealt with. It was the one of his future family's death. He had constructed strong shields around it and had refused, so far, to examine it, even though Charles had tried several times over the past three years to get him to deal with it.

Coming out of his brief meditation he caught the end of Severus' conversation with James. "...Yeah, I'm sorry about saying no immediately. Do you understand why though," his son was saying.

He heard James' slightly muffled reply, "Of course. Dad explained that it might be something like that. Still friends?"

Severus laughed. "Of course, idiot. Have you done your Christmas shopping?"

James shook his head. "Dad said we'd go to Diagon Alley this afternoon. Are you coming?"

"Dad says we are, so maybe we can shop together," Severus replied instantly.

"Cool," James said, excited at the prospect.

"James, can you send Remus through please. We're going to have lunch and then we'll meet you and your parents in Diagon Alley," Orion said, coming up behind Severus, who pulled aside so that James could see his uncle. James nodded and pulled back from his end to allow Remus through. As Orion and Severus pulled back from their fireplace, Remus stepped through, emerging a bit sooty and breathless.

"So, what's for lunch?" he asked as soon as he was back home.

Orion stared at him and then shook his head. "I thought bookworms ate books for lunch," he teased. Remus gave him an exasperated look and Orion relented. "I think Noddy's laid it out in the dining room."

"Wash up first!" he called as Remus and Severus immediately headed for the dining room at such a fast pace that Orion could swear they'd Apparated there. Grinning, he followed them, not wanting it all to disappear before he got there.

After an afternoon of Christmas shopping, marked with the hilarious antics of the Marauders as they tried to hide their purchases from each other and their parents, they all returned to Potter Manor where they ate dinner and made plans for this year's Christmas to be held at Marauder Manor. Since the first Christmas that Orion had had with his family, they'd spent each Christmas Day alternating between Potter Manor and Marauder Manor. This year, they were spending it at Marauder Manor and Orion mentally ran through a list of what he had to do to Marauder-proof the house for the day. Once dinner was over, Orion allowed Remus and Severus to stay with James for a sleepover while he returned home with their presents, locking them in his study under his invisibility cloak like he'd done in previous years. With the presents secure, he went to bed.

As he closed his eyes, he was swept into a nightmare, the likes of which he hadn't had in years. He tossed and turned, groaning as the

shields around his worst memories collapsed and they all melded into one terrifying memory.

"Freak! Lazy, little, good-for-nothing!" Vernon roared as he tossed a tiny Harry Potter into the cupboard. "You'll get no food for a week!" he snarled through the closed door before stomping back to the living room.

"Hey, there's Potter," Dudley sneered at the primary school they'd gone to. Six-year-old Harry looked up, his green eyes widening at the sight of Dudley and his gang. "Want to play a game, cousin," Dudley said, his eyes boring into Harry's. Harry shook his head, not liking the malicious look on his cousin's face.

"Well, too bad, you're going to," Dudley grinned. "It's called Harry-Hunting."

Harry's eyes widened and he ran as the four bigger boys tried to pounce on him. They gave chase, yelling insults at him the whole way. He slipped on a patch of concrete and fell hard, skinning his knees. His knees were quickly forgotten as the gang caught up with him and proceeded to beat him unconscious.

The memories continued, up to and through his Hogwarts years. Orion curled up in a ball and moaned, needing help to deal with the memories. He couldn't deal with them when they were overwhelming him like this. Closing his mental eyes he reached out, calling out for help.

In the recreation of Godric's Hollow, the inhabitants heard his plea for help. As one, they stood and made their way out of the house and into Harry's mind. They looked around before Severus started to lead the way to the left.

"How do you know the way?" James asked.

Severus turned an irritated glare on him. "I helped him deal with these memories before, James. I know where he put them, and I know why they've come back now."

"Why is that?" Sirius panted, not used to the fast pace that Severus was setting.

"He helped my younger self face his own bad memories today, it's no wonder that Harry's bad memories are haunting him now. He needs our help to get those memories locked up once more," Severus replied, looking worried.

"There he is!" Lily exclaimed, beginning to run forward. Severus grabbed her arm, stopping her.

"Let me go first," he said. Lily stared at him and then slowly nodded, realizing that as Severus had helped him before, Harry would be more likely to accept his help now. Nodding back, Severus transformed into his panther animagus form and bounded forward, jumping in between Harry and his nightmares.

Orion had curled up on the ground inside the graveyard as he watched his younger self battle with Voldemort. As the Death Eaters advanced towards him, he tried to stand up, but couldn't. Suddenly there was a snarl, and a huge panther leapt in front of him.

The Death Eaters hesitated and then stopped, the snarling panther keeping them at bay. Orion backed up, stopping when the panther backed up with him. Frowning, he stared at the big cat, feeling that he should know him.

"Severus?" he queried.

The panther gave as close to a purr as he could and grabbed Orion's arm, pulling him to his feet. When he was standing, the panther transformed back into Severus, and then the former potions master

pulled him into a hug.

"It's only memories, Harry. You know this, you've defeated them before," he said, his voice gentle.

Orion rubbed at his eyes, hating himself for feeling as young as the younger version of the man that was standing with him now. "Yes, but, I dealt with them one at a time. They've all combined. How do I defeat them now?" he asked.

"Face them and shove them all back behind those shields. We'll help you, but you have to be the one to do it," Severus replied, still hugging Orion tightly.

"We?" Orion asked, before he saw James, Lily, Sirius and Remus standing a little way behind him and Severus. "Oh no," he moaned.

"Why are you embarrassed?" James enquired, coming forward and enfolding his son in a tight hug. Giving up on the tattered remnants of his dignity and pride, Orion clung to his father like he was a lifeline.

"I don't know," he mumbled. "It's just that I can't deal with my own memories when the younger version of Severus was brave enough to deal with his."

"Yes, but your childhood was so similar to his in many ways that I'm not surprised this happened," the older version said firmly. "With the exception of the Cruciatus curses, Tobias and Vernon were very similar, so this was almost to be expected."

Orion untangled himself from Lily, she having taken James' place in hugging him early on. He looked sick as he said, "Yeah. That was horrible. How could any parent..." he trailed off and shivered, looking green. "How could he hate you," he muttered.

He felt Severus hug him again and then his former mentor murmured

in his ear, "He hated me because I was more like my mother than him. He hated me because he didn't understand me."

"I don't understand you at times and I love you," Orion snapped, pushing away from the older version of his son and glaring at him. "There's no excuse for the way he treated you!"

"I agree but before we debate this, why don't we get these memories back where they belong," Severus interrupted. Orion looked at him for a few minutes and then wearily nodded.

Before he could sink into depression, Remus and Sirius hugged him and Remus whispered in his ear, "We don't think any less of you for this you know"

Orion pulled back and nodded. Gathering his thoughts, he turned back to the frozen memory, and glared at the Death Eaters. "Get back behind those shields," he snarled, gathering up the memory and all but throwing it back where it should be. His family followed him as he rounded up each memory, helping him deal with it all over again and putting it back in its place.

As they came to the end of the escaped memories, Orion began to rebuild the shields around the entire area. He stopped when Sirius tugged on his arm.

"What's that," he asked, pointing to the thick wall behind which Orion knew was his truly worst memory.

Shaking his head, Orion growled, "It's nothing," and returned to building his shields.

"Don't lie to us," Lily snapped. Startled, Orion looked at his mother and gulped. Her eyes were sparking with anger, the same way his did when he was angry, Orion realized. Looking at the stern expressions on the faces of the rest of his family, he decided that

honesty was the best policy.

"Behind there is," he hesitated, and then ploughed on, "the memory of the death of my family. I don't want to deal with it right now."

"You mean you don't want to deal with it at all," Severus responded, his tone as sharp and as cutting as Orion had ever heard it. Locking eyes with his former student-turned-father, Severus growled, "You can't lock it away forever. You've helped my younger self deal with his worst memories, and now we will help you deal with yours."

"Not now," Orion pleaded but his family stood firmly behind him, blocking his escape.

"Show us, Harry, please." James' voice was quiet, pleading, and as Orion locked eyes with his father, he saw understanding, but also a firm resolve. Sighing, he knew that they wouldn't give in.

"OK," he muttered. "Can we go back to Godric's Hollow first though? I want to be comfortable for this."

Severus and James looked at him intently and then agreed, leading him back to the recreated house. They all sat on the furniture, with Lily and James on either side of Orion, and Severus sitting on the floor nearby, sensing that he'd be needed too. Remus and Sirius sat on the other chairs and waited.

Orion opened the shields surrounding his worst memory and let it play out. He watched with unseeing eyes as the fight replayed itself, saw Ron holding his daughter hostage, and then finally killing her. As the memory progressed, he'd felt first James, then Lily, then Severus, and finally Remus and Sirius all hugging him together.

James and the others had watched in silent horror as the memory had played out. As it ended, they heard a small, choked sob from the center of the couch. Looking at Orion, they saw that tears were

streaming down his face as all his emotional defenses against this memory crumbled. More sobs were heard and James and Severus looked at each other over the top of his head.

"Stop having a staring match and both hug me," Orion mumbled, knowing that his father and his mentor were trying to decide who should hug him first. He heard two chuckles and then two sets of arms encircled him tightly.

"I know you probably said this to my younger self, so I'll repeat it for your benefit now. It wasn't your fault," Severus whispered in his ear.

Orion wiped his eyes and gave him a weak glare. "How is it not my fault? I could have torn down the wards, done more to make sure that she and my children were safe. Because I didn't, they died. Tell me, how do I cope with the fact that the death of my family is because I didn't take the sensible option during an attack?"

"Would Hermione have taken the Portkey if you weren't trapped?" Lily asked, rubbing slow circles on her son's back, trying to get him to see the events in a different light. His assertion that he was responsible for the death of his family was worrying.

Orion stared at her. Finally, reluctantly, he shook his head. "No," he admitted. "She wouldn't have. She might have got the kids to take the Portkey to safety, but she'd have stayed."

"Exactly. You did everything you could have done, Harry. You couldn't have done any more," James insisted.

Orion stood, wrapping his arms round himself. With his back to his family, he whispered, "I wish I could believe you." He vanished from the house, needing to sleep properly after the emotionally draining experience that he'd just gone through.

Left alone, James, Lily, Severus, Remus and Sirius stared at each

other. Finally James said, "I think we shouldn't have forced him to go through that." He looked haunted, having to watch the death of his grandchildren was horrible, but more horrible than that was the obviously devastating effect it had had on his son.

"It needed to be done," Severus muttered, looking as sick as James did. "He told me what happened, but hearing it and seeing it are two different things."

"Do you think he'll be OK?" Remus asked, trying to turn the conversation onto a different topic. James and Severus looked at him, and then at each other, before they shrugged.

"I hope so," James said softly.

"Is there any way of watching what his life is like while he's awake?" Lily asked after a while. She watched with amusement as her question brought puzzled looks from her four companions, who didn't know what to make of the change in subject.

"What do you mean?" Sirius asked. "Seeing him how?"

Lily shook her head in exasperation. "I mean, we see various parts of his life if they're attached to particularly strong emotions, and we hear about the various exploits of Severus' and Remus' younger selves, or hear about various other parts of his life when he visits us now, but we don't actually see it. I want to be able to see it as it happens, not just hear about it later."

"Lily, we're dead," Sirius said, sounding surprisingly sensible for once. "Plus we're attached to here. We can't leave."

"Can't we?" Severus suddenly interrupted. "We're attached to Harry, not to one specific part of Harry. Why can't we go outside his head, and just hang around him but be invisible. We wouldn't need to be outside all the time, just every now and then."

"That wasn't quite what I meant, Sev," Lily said apologetically, ignoring the glare he shot her for shortening his name. "I was talking about somehow setting it up so his life plays out like a movie for us in here. Not seeing events through his eyes, but seeing them as though they were in a Pensieve."

"That is going to be incredibly complicated to manage, if it is even possible," Remus pointed out. "Also, we'd need his permission, and I can't see him giving that."

"Why not?" James enquired.

Remus and Severus smirked at each other and then said, "Well, we're not sure that he'd want you seeing the, ahem, less pleasant aspects of family life," Remus said, trailing off as James started laughing.

"You mean you two won't be comfortable watching what happens if your younger selves annoy him. The two of you hid under the sofa and refused to watch when your younger selves starting fighting at that impromptu sleepover, and then you left the house when it continued on to show the consequences afterwards," James chuckled.

Remus and Severus both blushed hotly as the fight and the ensuing consequences had been one of the memories that the residents of Godric's Hollow had seen without Orion being aware of it. "I think he was surprisingly lenient considering what he could have done," Severus muttered. "Besides, it was embarrassing to watch anyway, I don't know how you could stand to."

Before James could answer that, Remus broke into the conversation. "Putting that issue aside, I don't think that Harry would be comfortable having his parents and the rest of us viewing his own parenting techniques," he said. "Would you have been comfortable

disciplining him if you knew that Charles and Emma were able to watch what you did?"

James sobered up and looked thoughtful. "I see your point, but if we explain that we aren't going to second-guess him, then it ought to be OK. I mean, if we were still alive in the future, we wouldn't have second-guessed him, or interfered unless he asked us to. It's the same principle here. Besides, doesn't he know that we saw some of those earlier memories?"

Severus and Remus shook their heads, still looking uncomfortable. Seeing that they were still uncomfortable with the idea, Lily smiled and said, "If you really don't want us setting it up, then that's fine, we won't."

"I guess we could live with it," Severus muttered. "After all, it's not like we get in major trouble. Nothing like flying a car to Hogwarts anyway," he said.

Rueful chuckles greeted his statement and the five residents in Orion's mind settled down to sleep. They didn't really need it, but it helped to keep some sense of normalcy in their decidedly odd existence.

In his bed, Orion finally settled down to sleep. He hadn't heard the mental conversation after he'd left, but he'd recovered from being forced to relive the death of his future family. He rolled over and let an arm dangle over the side as he sighed in his sleep. What he'd said to Severus earlier in the day came back to him – it needed to be done. Changing positions one more time he let his mind drift into more pleasant dreams as sleep fully overtook him.

Somewhere in the countryside, Voldemort awoke from the coma that he'd been in since his fight with Orion. He groaned as he opened his eyes, struggling to make sense of what had happened, only to slam them shut again as they protested at the brightness of the light in the

room where he was. He swore in parseltongue as his body protested each and every movement, hating the fact that he was currently as helpless as a newborn kneazle kitten.

Sighing, he tried to go back to sleep, reasoning that the next time he awoke, he might feel better. As he slid back into unconsciousness, he swore that he'd find the Heir of Slytherin and kill him, leaving the way clear for Voldemort to assume the position that he felt was rightfully his.

Chapter Twenty Five: Christmas Mischief and Voldemort Visits

Several days after helping him deal with his worst memory, the occupants of Godric's Hollow were surprised to see Orion show up at the front door. They welcomed him inside, hugging him as they always did before sitting down and looking expectantly at him.

"I've come to the conclusion that you were right to force me to face that memory a few days ago," Orion started. "And I'm grateful for your help with dealing with the rest of my memories. I just came here to tell you that, because I knew you didn't like having to force me to go through that, any more than I did."

There was silence from his audience before Sirius said, "That's fine, Harry." He looked at Lily and inclined his head, causing Orion to look at them curiously.

"What's up?" he asked, leaning back on the couch, looking the picture of relaxation.

"Well," Lily said, hesitating as she tried to find the right words to explain her idea to her son, "we were thinking that, well, could we sort of set things up so that we could see your life as it happens."

Orion tilted his head to one side, puzzled. "How is that possible? Also, it would be rather odd, seeing events through my eyes."

"It wouldn't be through your eyes, Harry, it would show events as though we were viewing them in a Pensieve," Severus said. "The only difference between this and Pensieve events is that the events we'd see would be happening as we watch, they wouldn't be memories."

The five spirits all watched with bated breath as Orion considered their idea. Finally, he raised his head, and they relaxed as they saw a

familiar glimmer of mischief in the green depths. Within his mind, Orion kept his true appearance, not his outward one.

Locking eyes with Severus and Remus he asked blandly, "How would you feel, though, about seeing my reaction to your younger selves', hmm, shall we say, overenthusiastic exploits?"

He was surprised when his question brought two embarrassed looks from the wizards in question and he was even more surprised when James and Sirius almost fell off their seats laughing.

"Harry, we should tell you that," James began, barely able to speak through his chuckles, "that we've been able to see memories of yours which are attached to strong emotions."

"What do you mean?" Orion asked suspiciously.

"Remember that fight between Severus and myself when I transformed?" Remus asked, ducking his head as Orion raised his eyebrows and smirked as understanding dawned.

"I do indeed," Orion responded with a grin. "I take it that you saw that?"

Two more embarrassed looks from the older versions of his sons answered him and Orion chuckled. He looked at James, Lily and Sirius and then asked, "So, how did they react?"

"Hid under the sofa during the fight and left the house when it came to the consequences," Sirius answered with a laugh. Severus and Remus glared at him but couldn't repress rueful chuckles at the absurdity of the situation.

Orion shook his head slowly. "If I were to agree to this, and you were able to see my life as it was happening, would I be getting visits to suggest different parenting techniques, or other advice?"

"Not unless you specifically requested it," James assured him. "We would just be sitting in here and laughing at the mayhem that our younger selves create for you."

"As well as sympathizing with these two," Sirius added, indicating Severus and Remus.

Orion nodded and then once more locked eyes with Severus and Remus. "What about you two, are you going to be alright with this? I won't do it if you're not."

Severus and Remus looked at each other and then returned his steady gaze. "Despite our initial discomfort at the idea, we think that you're a wonderful father. Any family has its ups and downs, and we can cope with the downs because thanks to you there aren't that many of them," Remus started.

"I agree. Although I think there might be trouble ahead as our younger selves grow up, we do appreciate your approach to parenting," Severus added. "I have every confidence that this won't be a mistake, and you need not feel embarrassed to come and see us for advice on our younger selves if you need it."

Orion nodded thoughtfully. "OK. The next question is, how do we set this up?"

After a lot of ideas were brought up and discarded, Orion suddenly groaned. "I'm an idiot," he muttered.

"Why?" Lily asked.

Orion gave her a crooked grin. "This is my mind. Therefore, anything that I want in here, I can create. All I have to do is set it up how I want it and then make it permanent."

The spirits stared at him blankly for several minutes before they understood what he was getting at. When they did finally get it, James shook his head and growled playfully, "Get on with it then."

Orion smirked, snapped off a salute and shut his eyes, concentrating hard. Magic flowed from him, making the complicated idea a reality. No one bothered to tell him that what he was doing was supposed to be impossible. When he was finished, there was a blank screen on the wall facing the couch, and as they watched, a fuzzy blur appeared, resolving itself into a picture of Orion, asleep in his bed.

"Well, at least it works, even if it is weird to see myself asleep," Orion commented. Seeing that his family was far more entertained by the new big screen version of his life than by him, he shook his head, smiled and vanished from the house. The picture on the screen changed as he stretched a little in his sleep and changed positions before settling down.

"And we now have proper entertainment," Sirius commented, conjuring a bag of popcorn and passing it around. The others didn't disagree, taking some of the popcorn and eating it.

As Christmas morning dawned, the spirits were eagerly watching the movie screen to see what happened. Silence reigned in Godric's Hollow as they watched the events play out.

Severus and Remus poked their heads round Orion's bedroom door, checking to see if he was awake. Seeing that he was breathing evenly and appeared to be totally unaware of their presence, the two young Marauders crept into the room, and up to the bed.

Looking at each other, the two boys grinned, before simultaneously jumping on the bed and landing on top of their father. Orion's eyes shot open and he yelped as two heavy weights landed on his chest and stomach. Growling playfully, he reacted, engulfing his sons in headlocks and holding them still while they tried to squirm free.

"What are you two little monsters up to so early," he asked, releasing them and sitting up in the bed. Remus and Severus looked at each other and then back at him.

"We wanted to ask if we're still having Christmas dinner here," Severus said. He giggled as Orion dug his fingers into his sides and tickled him.

"Yes, we're still having dinner here," Orion answered, reaching over and ruffling Remus' hair. He checked the time and then yawned. "It's late enough to get up I suppose. Go get dressed and I'll join you for breakfast."

Severus and Remus disappeared so fast that Orion could have sworn they Apparated. Getting up, he looked at the ceiling and growled, "Mum, close your eyes."

In Godric's Hollow, Lily went bright red and obediently closed her eyes while the others laughed. When Orion had dressed, he said under his breath, "OK, it's safe to watch again."

After breakfast, the entire Potter family congregated in the living room at Marauder Manor for presents, Charles, Emma and James having arrived just as breakfast was being finished. Although the boys got right into tearing open their presents, the adults were more restrained about it. Orion also wondered exactly what his spirit family thought of it all. He shook his head, figuring that it would take a while to stop thinking like that, and opened a present from Charles and Emma.

"Wow," he breathed, holding the book and running his fingers lovingly over the gold-embossed title. Potter Family History the book said, and Orion looked up at his grandparents, his eyes filled with gratitude.

"Thank you," he whispered. Over the last three years, Charles and Emma had been feeding him the history of the Potter family, filling in all the blanks on things he would have known had he grown up with his parents. Not only had they filled in the blanks, they'd been incredibly patient with him while he learnt exactly what place their family had in Wizarding society. He'd learnt that they were the social and financial equals of the Malfoys, but they didn't involve themselves with politics the way the Malfoys did, and that they historically funded start-up businesses and contributed to charities and other social events. Putting the book aside for later study, Orion refocused his attention on the three boys who had torn open all their presents and were excitedly comparing them and bouncing around, waiting for their parents to finish opening theirs.

"What did Uncle Orion get you, Mum?" James asked as Emma reached for the last present, a parcel for her and Charles from Orion. The two elder Potters carefully felt the parcel, wondering what it was. Opening it, they gasped and then stared incredulously at Orion. The wrappings fell away to reveal the contents – a gleaming Pensieve, filled with swirling silver liquid.

"Orion, is this what I think it is," Charles asked, dumbfounded.

Orion nodded. "Yes." He knew that James, Severus and Remus were confused at the cryptic exchange but he couldn't tell them what it was – a copy of every single memory of his future family, from his wedding to Hermione, through the births of his children, right up to the last hug before they died. The moment of their deaths, of course, weren't included, as Orion had no wish to put that memory in there.

Seeing that the three boys were almost ready to start climbing the walls, Charles relented. "Go and play boys, but wrap up warmly if you go outside."

James, Severus and Remus promptly rushed outside, barely stopping to throw on coats and gloves. Orion picked up the family

history book and walked to the window. Opening both the window and the book, he stood there, reading the book from the first page, soaking up the information eagerly. He blinked in shock as a snowball hit him in the face and he hurriedly closed the book before it could be ruined.

Looking out to the front garden he saw three worried faces staring back at him. Shaking snow out of his hair he grinned. "You've just started a war," he called out. Putting the book on the table, he transformed into Shadow, jumped out the window, transformed back to human form and threw three snowballs at the Marauders, hitting each one of them with unerring accuracy. After spluttering in shock, the boys began pelting him with snow, and Orion willingly returned fire.

In Godric's Hollow, the occupants were watching the snow war with more than a little longing. James, Sirius, Remus and Severus were wishing they could join in while Lily was fretting about them all dying of hypothermia.

"Uh oh," James suddenly said, seeing Orion stand up and begin to make several snowballs. The others watched in silence as Orion enchanted the snowballs with several spells and then winked at the younger versions of James, Severus and Remus.

"Watch this," he said with a glimmer of mischief in his eyes. Both versions of James, Severus and Remus watched with wide eyes as Orion sent the snowballs flying inside the manor. A roar of "ORION JAMES POTTER, STOP THESE SNOWBALLS THIS INSTANT!!" was heard and Orion grinned unashamedly.

"I thought they needed to chill out," he said, causing the three boys to roll around laughing. A very wet and slightly annoyed Charles Potter appeared at the front door, raised his wand and sent Orion flying into a conveniently placed snow bank. Rolling free, Orion spat snow out of his mouth, cleaned it out of his eyes and ears and shook it out of

his hair.

He locked eyes with James, Severus and Remus, before he flicked his gaze briefly to Charles and back again, with a wicked grin on his face. The boys understood what he wanted immediately, and Charles soon found himself pelted with snowballs from the four younger members of his family. Driven back indoors, a white flag soon hung from the window, signaling the end of the war.

"That was great Uncle Orion," James said. Severus and Remus hung off Orion's arms, excitedly agreeing with their cousin. Orion himself just laughed, ruffled their hair and drew his wand, casting a warming charm over them before heading indoors to dry off and change clothes. Charles directed a dark look at his grandson but Orion just grinned at him, completely undeterred by the glare. As the cold group disappeared up the stairs to change, Charles shook his head and looked at his wife.

"What are we going to do? There's four of them now," he moaned.

"What do you mean?" Emma enquired with a chuckle.

Charles shook his head. "I mean that we only had to worry about the younger three's pranks before this Christmas. Now Orion's joining in! He can use more magic than they can!"

"Calm down," Emma said soothingly. "I think Orion's just enjoying the chance to let go and relax for a while. How often have you seen him be that relaxed, that happy and carefree? Even when he's played games with the kids before, he's never been totally relaxed; it's always like he's waiting for something bad to happen. And the fact that he's unbent enough to pelt you with snowballs is a good thing."

Charles grumbled a bit more but conceded that Emma had a point. "I know, I just didn't like that I couldn't return fire," he muttered as the snowball quartet came back downstairs.

Hearing the last comment, Orion sat down opposite his grandfather and grinned. "Sending me into that snowbank counts as returning fire in my book," he said. Charles peered at him and then suddenly grinned back.

"You're right. It was entertaining watching you fly backwards the way you did. So is this."

Orion wrinkled his nose as Charles flicked his wand towards him. Guessing that the older wizard wanted a bit of payback, and knowing that Charles would never hurt him, Orion let the spell hit him and then narrowed his eyes as he felt a strange sensation on his head and felt his face change shape.

James, Severus and Remus stared at Orion in shock before they started to giggle, and then laughed outright.

"What did you do?" Orion tried to say. He stopped as what came out didn't sound anything like his normal voice. Emma grinned and held up a mirror so he could see. Orion's eyes widened in shock, he had been partially turned into Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer.

Grabbing his wand, he let loose an alarmed sounding noise as he saw that the transformation was slowly continuing. Within minutes, he was a reindeer.

"Cool, can we have a sleigh too?" Severus asked. Charles' eyes lit up and he stared thoughtfully at his grandson, who was pawing the ground and tossing his head in mock distress.

"Why not," he said, conjuring a sleigh and attaching it to Orion. James, Severus and Remus clambered in, along with Emma, while Charles got up in the driver's seat. Picking up the reins, he conjured snow for the reindeer version of his grandson to drag the sleigh out the door, before he said, "Go on, Rudolph."

Orion turned his head and snorted at his grandfather. His eyes widened when Charles gently tapped him with the whip that he'd conjured along with the sleigh. Deciding that he really didn't mind pulling the sleigh, Orion started forward, and much to his surprise, found that he actually enjoyed it. In fact, he soon found that Charles was holding him back and he kicked up his heels, snorting as he strained against the harness and the reins, wanting to go faster.

"Let him go, Uncle Charles," Severus and Remus called out from the back of the sleigh. Hearing their request, Charles relaxed the reins and was almost thrown backwards to join the others at the burst of speed that Orion put on when the reins were released. Just managing to catch himself, Charles pulled slightly on the reins.

"Easy there, Rudolph," he said, keeping his touch on the reins light and firm. Understanding that Charles wanted him to slow down just a little, Orion shook his head, but slowed down just a little. Soon he felt a firm pressure at the left corner of his mouth. Obeying the pressure, he turned, still dragging the sleigh. He stopped when Charles pulled at both reins. Turning his head, he looked at his grandfather, who wrapped one arm around the back of the driver's seat and winked at him.

"Hold on everyone," Charles said, before nodding to Orion. "Full speed ahead," he ordered.

Orion snorted, and moved forward. Picking up speed, he was soon running at top speed. He could hear the whoops of delight from James, Severus and Remus, the pleas from Emma to slow down, and the steady encouragement from Charles to keep going.

Unfortunately, snow can be treacherous, it can hide dangers that otherwise one would see. Around the grounds of Marauder Manor, there were a lot of rabbits, and, therefore, rabbit holes. Not seeing one through the snow, Orion's left front hoof went in one, and he

stumbled.

Charles, who had been talking to Emma and enjoying the fast ride, felt the reins suddenly change angle and then become very slack as the sleigh thumped into a solid obstacle. Three heads popped up from the back as Remus asked, "Uncle Charles, what's wrong? Why have we stopped?"

"Stay in the sleigh," Charles ordered as he got down and went towards the downed reindeer. Orion was lying on his side, his eyes filled with silent pain as he tried to move his broken legs. His left front leg had broken when he'd stepped in the rabbit hole, and the sleigh had run into him while he'd been lying down, breaking both hind legs and bruising his back.

"Dad!" Severus and Remus exclaimed, followed by James' panicked yell of "Uncle Orion!" The boys scrambled out of the sled, ignoring Charles' growled order to stay back. They ran to the injured deer and crouched down beside him. Severus and Remus decided to support their father's head, while James was busy stroking his side.

"James, be careful," Charles warned as Orion made a pained noise when James accidentally pressed a tender spot. The Potter Family patriarch slowly straightened the injured legs, wincing as his grandson groaned in pain.

"Can't you transform him back and then we could take him to St. Mungo's," James said, trying to comfort his uncle while his father was dealing with his legs. Charles looked up and shook his head.

"I'm afraid not, James. An injury this severe, we can't risk the potential complications it might create if we changed him back."

"What complications?" Severus asked. "And can't you give him a pain-relief potion?" he demanded as Orion winced again when Charles gently stroked his legs.

"Right now, if we were to change him back, his left arm would be broken, both his legs, and there might be spinal complications. We could get the vet in though," Charles mused, giving Orion's head a brief stroke.

"It's OK, Orion, we'll get you better," he said softly. Looking around, he sighed, and gave his family a frustrated look. "It's going to be OK," he murmured. Orion gave him as annoyed a look as he could and struggled to get up.

"Orion, you've got three broken legs, you can't possibly walk," Charles said, stopping the reindeer's effort to move before he damaged himself even more. Orion stopped moving and flopped down, resigning himself to his injuries for the moment. He looked up as Charles transfigured another sled, and then picked him up, putting him on the soft bed of furs and gently patting the side of his face.

Moving to the front, Charles picked up one of the ropes attached to the sled. He gestured to the boys to pick up the other three ropes.

"Come on guys, let's get him home," he said. James, Severus and Remus picked up the slack on their ropes and began to pull forward. Charles added his help and the sleigh slowly moved forward. Emma remained on the sleigh with the injured reindeer, stroking him and talking quietly to keep him calm.

When they got back to Marauder Manor, Charles Floo called the local vet, who, upon hearing the problem, also suggested getting hold of someone from St. Mungo's who was experienced in people being injured while in a transfigured form. Gathering the needed supplies, the vet came through the fire, and shortly afterwards, so did a healer from St. Mungo's.

They found Orion in front of the couch, lying on fur rugs, his head supported on James' lap and licking Remus and Severus' hands in

turn. The three boys looked anxiously at the vet as he injected a pain-relief potion and then an anesthetic into Orion's bloodstream. Within seconds, he was out like a light, and the vet and the healer went to work.

"What did he step in?" the vet asked, frowning as he examined Orion's left front leg and then the back ones.

"He stepped in a rabbit hole and then the sleigh he was pulling ran into his back legs," Charles answered, looking worried. "Is there a problem?"

"Well," the healer answered, "we can, theoretically, vanish the bones in all three damaged legs, and then return him to his normal form to finish the treatment."

"That is not advisable. The bruising to his spine needs to heal before anything of that nature can be attempted," the vet snapped back. "I realize that it's Christmas Day, but if you want him fully healed, I suggest leaving him as he is for now."

This sparked a heated debate between the two healers. Finally, the boys grew fed up.

"Dad won't want to remain a reindeer for the rest of Christmas!" Severus snapped. Pointing his wand at his father's unconscious form, he was joined by James and Remus as they said, "Finite Incantatem!"

"NO!" the adults yelled, but it was too late. The reindeer shivered and then transformed back into Orion. Even unconscious, he moaned in pain before abruptly falling silent. The healer from St. Mungo's quickly ran diagnostics on the unconscious wizard before glaring at the boys.

"You're very lucky you didn't paralyze him with that stunt," he

snapped.

"Is he OK?" Charles asked, annoyed at the healer for yelling at his son and his nephews, but also annoyed that they had interfered when asked not to.

The healer nodded. "He will be, after we vanish his broken bones and give him a dose of Skele-Gro to re-grow them."

"Do it," Charles said, wanting Orion back. What had started as a joke had turned bad and he wanted to salvage some Christmas cheer from the day. The healer nodded, and removed the bones in Orion's left arm and both legs, before waking him up.

"Easy, Mr Potter," the healer murmured. "I've removed your bones; I need you to drink this Skele-Gro to get them back."

Orion sat up carefully. Supported by Charles and Emma, he reached out and took the Skele-Gro from the healer, drinking it quickly and handing the small cup back.

"Ugh," he muttered. "Is everyone else alright," he asked, looking around and seeing five worried faces staring back at him.

"We're fine, Dad, what about you?" Severus said, leaning against his father's good side. Orion gently patted his back.

"I'll be OK," he said. He looked at the vet and the healer and smiled. "Thank you," he said. "I'm grateful that you gave up part of your Christmas Day to help me."

Both of the health professionals waved off his thanks. "It's perfectly fine. I'll be back tomorrow to check that your legs and your arm are back in working order. Stay off your feet until then, but, given that the rest of your body seems to be alright, have a happy rest of your Christmas Day," the healer ordered.

Orion nodded, and then levitated himself up onto the couch, relaxing back into it with a groan. "Well, that was fun," he murmured.

"Yeah, up until you broke your legs," Remus muttered.

Orion gave a rueful chuckle. "I will admit that that part wasn't fun, but this is only a minor setback in my plans for today."

"What plans?" Severus and James asked, echoed closely by Remus. Orion smirked at them and then beckoned them closer. Leaning in close, he whispered something to them, and when they drew back, Charles closed his eyes in mock pain.

"Oh no, the Marauder quartet is back in action," he whispered to Emma, who frowned briefly before seeing the mischievous looks on all the boys' faces and the glimmer of mischief in Orion's eyes which was duller than usual due to the events of the morning, but still present.

"What are you planning?" Charles asked suspiciously.

Orion gave him an innocent look. "Me? Why would I be planning anything? What could I possibly do in this state?" he indicated his arm and legs.

"You still have magic," Charles said. He walked over to the couch and crouched down in front of Orion. Locking eyes with him, Charles growled playfully, "Try anything and I'll ground you."

Orion looked wounded. "You'll what?" he whined, but the sparkle in his eyes betrayed him. "You can't do that. I'm an adult."

"Watch me," Charles returned, his eyes sparkling like Orion's. They both knew that whatever Orion did, or helped the three Marauders to do, Charles would do nothing in response other than roll his eyes.

The rest of the day, throughout lunch and then up to dinner was marked by pranks that were funny and harmless. Charles turned into a lion and then back again, James turned into a stag and then back again. Severus grew cat ears and a tail that didn't disappear until he ate and then drank items in a certain order. The final prank was when the turkey that was supposed to be for dinner, jumped up on its legs and scampered down the table, screaming, "Don't eat me, please, don't eat me!"

Charles covered his eyes and sighed. "Orion, I realize you didn't grow up with your parents, but please, the turkey is supposed to be eaten, not played with."

Orion gave him a mock-sorrowful look, and the turkey reluctantly moved back to the platter. Picking up the carving knife, Charles eyed Orion suspiciously, before carefully cutting into the bird, which, thankfully, didn't move again.

That night, after an argument between Charles and Orion over sleeping arrangements, the entire Potter family was sleeping in Marauder Manor. Remus and Severus were in their own rooms; James took the guest bedroom on the other side of Remus' while Charles and Emma took one of the two remaining rooms for their own. Orion went to sleep with a frown on his face, not liking the fact that his grandfather had told him sternly to stay in bed until the healer gave him a clean bill of health the following morning. Dangling his one good arm off the side of the bed, he slid into his mind. He needed to visit his family, and see what they thought of the day.

As it turned out, the occupants of Godric's Hollow thought that it was the best reality television they'd ever seen. With the exception of the breaking his legs part, James, Severus, Remus and Sirius all agreed that the day had been a success.

"Especially the pranks," James laughed, remembering the turkey

running down the table.

Orion grinned. "Yeah, well, I figured Christmas was a good time to indulge my Marauder side," he said. His family agreed with him, and they all had a good laugh. Orion winced as his arm tingled, and then his legs gave a particularly vicious twinge. "Ouch," he muttered. "I'm going to get back. I need to sleep."

Just as he stood up, he sat back down with a grunt of pain. "What's wrong?" Severus asked, seeing Orion's hand fly to his forehead and cover his scar.

"Voldemort," Orion whispered through clenched teeth. "He's awake, he's aware of the link, and he's trying to test the limits of it."

"What are you going to do?" Sirius asked.

Orion stood up as the pain passed. "I'm going to tell him to get lost," he snapped, walking out of the house and towards the place where the link to Voldemort was embedded in his mind.

He could sense the Dark Lord on the other side of the shields, trying to get through. Cautiously, he reached out, trying to get a feel for this version of Voldemort, the one which wasn't totally insane.

"Be careful, Harry," Severus urged. "Don't mix your mind with his."

"I know," Orion responded. He tensed, and then frowned. "It's like he's trying to send a message," he muttered.

"Harry," Severus warned. Hearing the warning, Orion stopped and looked sheepishly at his former mentor.

"I wasn't going to do anything," he muttered.

Severus arched an eyebrow. "Right," he drawled. "Your curiosity will

be the death of you one day. Go and get some rest, worry about the Dark Idiot later."

Orion grinned at Severus' irreverent nickname for Voldemort, and obeyed, vanishing a split second later. Voldemort, having failed at getting through Orion's extremely strong shields, retreated to his own mind, resolving to try a different way of getting to the Heir of Slytherin, who's mind his own was linked with.

"There has to be a way, Nagini," he hissed in Parseltongue. His familiar looked up at him and flicked her tail in agitation, but otherwise did not answer. Voldemort growled, ever since he'd told her that his intended target was the Heir of Slytherin she'd been behaving strangely. If he didn't know better, he'd think that she was thinking of switching sides. Deciding to try again in the New Year, he let his head drop forward, closing his eyes. He was asleep a moment later.

After Voldemort's visit, the spirit Marauders watched over Orion as he slept, oblivious to the plans being made by certain wizards around the country which would ensnare his family in trouble far down the road.

Chapter Twenty-Six: Preliminaries and Werewolf Issues

The owls swooped into the Great Hall at breakfast, dropping various things in their owner's laps, or in front of them before swooping out again. Since it was a Saturday, the students weren't restricted to their house tables and so Severus was sitting with the rest of the Marauders at the Gryffindor table and eagerly discussing who they thought would be in the final six to get a chance at competing in next year's tournament. The five second year students, as Lily usually sat with them too, were sure that Orion would get in, as he was, "too good not to," as Severus and Remus put it.

Sirius was hoping that his father also got into the top six, which earned him thoughtful looks from Severus and Remus. The boys stared at each other and then grinned; a duel between their fathers would be a sight to behold. Orion Black was a skilled duelist, cunning and crafty as a Slytherin should be, but he'd only ever dueled in tournaments, under tournament rules. Orion Potter, on the other hand, had fought in a war, and his job required him to fight in battles where the only rule was either you killed your opponent or they killed you. This had made him less predictable, more likely to exploit any opportunity, no matter how small, in order to come out on top.

"Well, we'll hear the results tonight," James said finally, putting the paper down on the table. He'd been reading the results of the previous rounds, and his uncle was doing well. He wished they'd been allowed to see the duels as they happened, a wish which was shared by all the students at Hogwarts.

In an arena specially created for the preliminary rounds, Orion was engaged in a duel with a wizard who reminded him of Gilderoy Lockhart. He'd been dancing around the stage, playing to the crowd, and Orion was rapidly growing tired of it. With a sigh, he hissed a Disarming spell and won the duel with ease. As he was announced as the winner, he threw the captured wand back to his opponent and stalked off the stage, sitting down with Charles and Emma who had

come along as support.

"That was a waste of time," he fumed as he sat down. "A total waste of time."

Charles gave him a stern look. "Calm down, Orion. Yes, most of your opponents won't be up to your standard, but that is just because they haven't had your extensive training. Don't waste your time and energy getting annoyed at those you feel are wasting your time. Focus your energy on those opponents who are at your skill level or better, and focus on winning against them. Then, and only then, will you have a chance at being in the top six."

Orion nodded, accepting both the rebuke and the advice. "What's happening in the other groups?" he asked. Charles looked up at the board which was displayed above the arena. "Hmm. It looks like Abraxas Malfoy and Orion Black have both got through to the top six. The other three groups have also produced a winner. Only your group is left."

Orion looked at who his next opponent was, and closed his eyes, mentally preparing for the upcoming duel. He was just settling into his preparation routine when he heard a very familiar and very unwelcome sound.

"Hem, hem." The sound of a throat being cleared behind them caused Orion to stiffen abruptly. Charles noticed the sudden tenseness in his shoulders, the way that his right hand clenched convulsively and he frowned.

The Potters turned round to see Dolores Umbridge standing just behind their chairs. Charles raised his eyebrows. "Did you need something Madam?" he asked.

"I couldn't help but overhear your conversation," the toad-like woman simpered. She was younger than Orion remembered, but he didn't

like her all the same. Charles felt the tension in his grandson skyrocket and narrowed his eyes.

"Eavesdropping on private conversations is very rude," he said mildly. "If you have nothing to say, then please leave. Orion needs to prepare for his next match."

Umbridge huffed in annoyance, but backed away. She didn't want to annoy the head of a powerful, old, pure-blood family like the Potters. She glared at Charles, who merely gazed at her, a flicker of annoyance in his usually warm hazel eyes, and she suddenly found an excuse to be somewhere else.

"How did you do that?" Orion asked, interested.

Charles looked at him and then grinned. "I showed her that I wasn't going to be pushed around. The fact that I'm the head of an ancient, powerful family and she isn't helps – we're of a higher rank, essentially."

Orion tilted his head to the side as he thought about it. Finally, he shrugged. "Just keep her away from me, please," he said.

Charles looked surprised. "Why do you need me to do that? Aren't you the one who can clear Ministry corridors just by walking down them?"

Orion smirked at his grandfather. Charles was referring to the time when the head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, or DMLE, had tried to make all the Unspeakables submit to questioning at any time by Aurors, to determine that they weren't Death Eaters. This had caused a storm of protest among the Unspeakables, who were historically under no one's rule but their own. Croaker answered to the Minister of Magic, but even the Minister couldn't compel the Unspeakables to submit to questioning. After failing with several Unspeakables, the Aurors had walked into Orion's office.

"Unspeakable Hunter, by order of the Director of Magical Law Enforcement, we hereby summon you for questioning under Veritaserum to ensure that you are not a member of the criminal organization known as the Death Eaters," the officious and more-than-slightly rotund senior Auror had said.

Orion had looked up from his paperwork and stared at the six Aurors crowded in his office. "No," he said calmly, and continued writing out his latest mission report. One of the Aurors grabbed his arm, and pulled on it, making Orion smear ink all over his neatly written report.

The Aurors all gulped as Orion glared at them with fire in his eyes. He let his eye color flicker from gold to their real, green color, having discovered that glaring at people with eyes the color of the Avada Kedavra curse was very effective for intimidation purposes. He slowly stood, allowing his magic to flow from him in tightly controlled waves, buffeting the Aurors where they stood.

"I said no," he growled, before stalking out of his office and out of the Department of Mysteries. He continued on his way towards the Director's office, noticing with grim satisfaction that people took one look at him and jumped out of his way. Slamming the door of the office open, he came to an abrupt stop before the desk.

"I resent being ordered around by officious little busybodies," he snapped when the Director of the DMLE asked him what was wrong. Reining his temper in, Orion growled, and was about to say something else when Croaker walked through the now open door.

"I told you, Crouch," Croaker said mildly, but with a hint of steel underlying his words, "my Unspeakables will not take well to being ordered around by Aurors, nor will they consent to be questioned whenever your little paper-pushers decide it's a good time to start asking questions. Leave us alone, or you'll end up with several of your men in St. Mungo's."

Crouch glared at both of them, before gulping as Orion turned a deadly glare on him. Seeing this, Croaker put a hand on his arm.

"Come on, Hunter. Let's get back to work, we're finished here," the head Unspeakable said calmly. Orion stared at him, and then pulled himself back under control. Giving his boss a tight nod, Orion turned and stalked out of the office.

Pulling himself out of the memory, Orion grinned at Charles. "I can take care of myself, but as you said, I do need to concentrate on my next opponent. How can I do that if I have to deal with the toad?"

Charles shook his head, trying to look disapproving but not quite managing it. "Very well, I'll keep the annoying Ministry officials away from you," he sighed. Orion looked worried for a second, but then relaxed as he realized that his grandfather was teasing him. Shaking his own head, he stood up as he heard his name being called. He loosened up his muscles with a quick non-verbal spell, and walked confidently to the middle of the arena.

Three duels later and Orion was announced as the final member of the top six candidates who would go to Hogwarts to be considered as possible competitors in the Triwizard Tournament (adult version). As he walked away from the arena, Orion idly wondered what sort of tasks they'd be expected to perform. He couldn't help but think that if the tasks for school-age competitors were so dangerous, what would they think was suitable for adults? Subduing a Nundu, or maybe a hungry Basilisk? Going through a maze where the hedges were full of man-eating plants? Seeing if they could survive a Dementor's Kiss?

The Potters stopped as they heard someone calling for Orion. Said wizard turned around and faced the caller, who was revealed to be Dolores Umbridge. Orion ground his teeth together as she held out a Blood Quill to him, along with a contract.

"Mr Potter, as one of the final six, you all have to sign this contract to say that you'll show up at Hogwarts to put your name in the Goblet of Fire and then show up on the day that it chooses the six contestants. Failure to show will constitute a breach of contract and you may lose your magic."

Orion looked at the sickly sweet smile on Umbridge's face and had to resist the urge to snap the quill in half. He suddenly had a thought. "Madam Umbridge, might I ask if any of the other contestants have to sign using a Blood Quill?" he said suspiciously.

Umbridge looked taken aback. "Yes, of course they did. Just look," she said.

Orion looked to where Orion Black and Abraxus Malfoy were glaring in Umbridge's direction while massaging their hands. Enhancing his sense of smell, Orion could smell the coppery tang of fresh blood. Taking the contract, he left the quill in Umbridge's hand.

"I'm not signing this until I've read the fine print," he said shortly when she looked about to object. Sitting down in a nearby seat, Orion swiftly read the contract, staring hard at the fine print at the bottom. When he was satisfied that there were no clauses that would catch him by surprise, and no legal loopholes otherwise, he reached for the quill. He looked at it, and then, with an internal shudder, put it on the dotted line at the bottom and quickly signed, ignoring the sharp sting on the back of his hand. Finished, he handed the quill back to Umbridge, the contract having disappeared in a puff of smoke.

"Let's go home," he said tersely to Charles and Emma, the incident having soured his mood quite effectively. He rubbed his right hand as they walked to the Apparition point, growling inwardly; unable to banish the memory of the wide smile Umbridge had worn as he'd signed his name.

"That woman takes far too much pleasure in torturing people," he muttered just before he Apparated to Marauder Manor, Charles and Emma following. When they got there, the phone was ringing and Orion hurriedly picked it up.

"Daniel," he said, surprised but pleased. Daniel Evans, hearing his surprise, laughed on the other end of the phone.

"Orion, how are you?" he asked. "I was calling to ask if you'd mind Rose and I coming over this afternoon. We haven't seen you since the kids went off to Hogwarts."

Orion thought for a second and then said, "Sure. Come on over, and bring Petunia too if she's home."

"Petunia's out with a friend but Rose and I will see you in about an hour," Daniel said, having known for some time how to get to Marauder Manor by car. After exchanging a few more pleasantries and Orion informing his maternal grandfather that his other set of grandparents would also be present, the call ended.

"Well, this will be interesting," Emma said with a smile. Orion just nodded, the exhaustion of the day's events suddenly catching up with him. He steadied himself with a hand on the couch and then walked slowly to the kitchen, grabbing a Pepper-Up potion to help him stay awake through Daniel and Rose's visit.

An hour later, Daniel and Rose arrived, the car pulling up in the driveway. Charles and Emma remained in the lounge while Orion went to greet the visitors, watching through the windows as he hugged them and then led them towards the house.

After introducing his two sets of grandparents to each other, Orion started a conversation about how the Evans' were doing with regard to dealing with the existence of magic. He was pleased to hear that they were still just as fascinated as ever, and even Petunia was

showing some interest in what her sister was learning at Hogwarts, reading her letters home with as much interest as Daniel and Rose. After that, a debate was started on the differences between the two worlds, and could they ever be brought together. Charles and Emma thought that there was too much misunderstanding between the worlds to bring them together, while Daniel and Rose thought differently. Orion himself was in the middle, thinking that it could be done if Voldemort was taken out of the equation first, and the more anti-magic Muggles were also neutralized.

After a pleasant late lunch, where Orion had to relate more stories of his school days, to gasps of horror from his grandmothers and disapproving frowns from his grandfathers, the topic turned to the tournament being held the next year.

"And you said you were illegally entered in the school version of it in your fourth year?" Rose queried, holding a glass of butterbeer and sipping it appreciatively.

Orion nodded, taking a sip of his absinthe. "Yes. Although, with the tasks which they thought were child-friendly, I'm wondering just how dangerous this tournament is going to be. Probably death-defying at every stage."

"Then you'll just have to be careful," Charles stated firmly. "I'm not going to have you die on us before the great secret is revealed."

Orion chuckled. "I think our children will draw some conclusions long before they're seventeen, Charles, and if that happens, then I will reveal it early. It's going to be amusing."

Charles shook his head. "Yes, it will be. Getting back on track, how do you feel that you'll cope with the tournament? I mean, you've got your job to consider."

"I think I'll be OK," Orion replied, "and besides, Croaker thinks that if

I'm in the tournament it will give me a perfect excuse to be at Hogwarts during the year. He thinks something's up, and also believes that Hogwarts might offer a clue to the location of the two items of buried treasure that I have yet to locate."

"All the same, be careful. What sort of tasks did you have to do when you were in school?" Rose enquired, looking worried.

Orion leaned back in his chair, and with a wicked grin on his face he waited till all his grandparents had taken a sip of their drinks before saying blandly, "Oh, nothing much, just out-flying a dragon."

His timing was perfect but his position wasn't, as he found himself sprayed with firewhiskey and butterbeer. Coughing, he cleaned his clothes and the furniture with a spell and stared at his four relatives, all of whom were staring back.

"You flew against a dragon!" Emma said incredulously.

Orion nodded. "Yes. Want to see?"

His grandparents looked at each other and then sighed. "Very well," Charles said. "Projector mode."

As Daniel and Rose watched in fascination, Orion set up his Pensieve, explaining to them what it was and how it was used. The Pensieve that he'd given to Charles and Emma for Christmas had been a new purchase as he hadn't wanted to give them his old one. He deposited the memory in the bowl and prodded it with his wand.

As the memory began to play up above the bowl, Orion sat back and watched the reaction of his audience. He did have to admit that the events in the memory looked pretty scary. When the memory had finished, Orion was the recipient of four horrified looks.

"You were fourteen, you could have died!" Daniel finally exploded.

"Did the organizers have no respect for the fact that you were a kid, up against three older kids, and all of you were expected to fight a dragon?!"

Orion looked uncomfortable. "Charles, Emma, would you mind explaining how binding contracts work in the wizarding world please," he requested, wondering how Daniel would take the fact that he'd had to compete or else lose his magic. As it turned out, Daniel didn't take it well, and neither did Rose. Charles and Emma, having grown up with the idea of binding magical contracts were more accepting, although they felt that forcing a fourteen-year-old to compete against three seventeen-year-olds was unfair, and the fact that he'd been entered into the tournament illegally was infuriating to them. After they'd all calmed down, Orion said carefully, "The other two tasks weren't really difficult, swimming in the lake and getting through a maze. The part I didn't like was when I was made the key ingredient in Voldemort's rebirth ritual. Or rather, my blood was."

That statement didn't get much reaction, as the others were still shocked over the dragon incident. Finally Rose asked faintly, "What else did you have to do that year?"

Orion laughed. "There was a ball held on Christmas Eve, and the champions had to open the dancing. I had to find myself a date and ended up asking Hermione to the ball because I figured we were both friends and she wouldn't drool over the prospect of going to the ball with the Boy-Who-Lived.

"How did you ask her?" Charles asked, his eyes sparkling with a mischievous gleam as he imagined the possible scene.

Orion looked at him and then shrugged before placing the memory in the Pensieve. Once more, he prodded the liquid and the memory rose up, beginning to play.

Harry flopped down onto the couch in the Gryffindor common room,

covering his face with his hands. He barely noticed when Hermione sat next to him and looked at him worriedly.

"Harry, what's wrong?" she asked, hesitantly putting a hand on his arm. Harry looked at her and sighed.

"I have to find a date for the Yule Ball but all the girls are either already taken or are so star-struck over the possibility of going with The Boy-Who-Lived that they get all silly when I approach them, which is very off-putting. What am I going to do?"

"Have you considered asking one of your friends?" Hermione suggested.

Harry stared at her, and then he realized what she was saying. "Um, Hermione, you don't have a date already do you?" he asked.

Hermione shook her head and then watched in amusement as Harry's face reddened and he stumbled and stuttered over his next words.

"Um, well, I, er," he began. Hermione waited patiently, suspecting what he was trying to say. She was rewarded when Harry blurted out, "?"

"I didn't quite catch that, Harry, could you repeat it?" she asked.

Harry took a deep breath and then said, "I said, would you like to go to the ball with me?"

Hermione smiled and then hugged him. "Of course, Harry. Do you know how to dance?"

Harry shook his head. "I was kind of hoping to ask Professor McGonagall if she'd teach me," he mumbled.

"That's a great idea, I don't know how to dance properly either so we can practice together," was Hermione's ever practical response. Harry looked at her in amazement but she only smiled and redirected his attention to his neglected Potions homework.

Orion had dropped his head in his hands, thoroughly embarrassed by the memory. Rose and Emma pulled his head up and then as one, hugged him tightly. "That was really sweet," Rose said in his left ear.

"And you have nothing to be embarrassed about," Emma said into his right ear.

Orion stared at them and then relaxed. "OK. Now you've seen that, what now?"

"Now we," Charles began, stopping abruptly as Orion's hands flew up to cover his forehead. Blood slowly began to trail down his face as the hidden scar burst open and bled freely. Groaning, Orion curled up on the couch, mustering every scrap of Occlumency he knew to keep Voldemort out but it was futile. The Dark Lord was in a fury and he was attacking Orion's end of the bond with everything he had.

Thinking that it would hurt less if he let the vision play out, Orion allowed himself to see through his enemy's eyes once again.

"Nagini!!" Voldemort screamed in anger. The snake, who wasn't the original Nagini, but one of her daughters, hissed back angrily. The original Nagini had died when Riddle Manor collapsed, causing Voldemort to lose one of his Horcruxes, but the Dark Lord wasn't very original when it came to names, and had named Nagini's daughter after her mother.

The difference between the two, the Dark Lord thought viciously, was that while the first Nagini was loyal to him, her daughter wasn't. Her daughter would rather serve the Heir of Slytherin than him, and that

was why he was so furious. The big snake had told him that he was never going to be Lord Slytherin, and that he would never command the attention and respect of the serpents the way that Lord Slytherin could. As she was leaving, Voldemort snarled in anger and lashed out, severing the snake's head with one curse. His anger spent, the Dark Lord abruptly sat down and cursed the entire world, and most especially the bloody Heir of Slytherin for messing up all his carefully laid plans.

When the vision ended, Orion came round to find himself on the couch, his head cradled in Rose's lap while Daniel, Charles and Emma hovered anxiously over him. Coughing, he slowly sat up and when he was fully upright, he smiled grimly.

"I'm sorry if I scared you, my Occlumency shields are supposed to protect me from incidents like that but Voldemort wasn't going to let up so I allowed myself to see what he was up to," he explained.

"And what exactly is that maniac up to?" Charles enquired, a dangerous edge to his voice telling Orion that he was extremely annoyed. Looking at the way that his grandfather was eyeing him, Orion was prepared to bet that Charles was annoyed with him choosing to allow Voldemort into his mind, however briefly. Shaking off that thought, Orion leant back against Rose and closed his eyes.

"When Nagini was killed last year, he named one of her daughters after her. She's not like her mother though, and flat out told old Voldy that she would rather serve the Heir of Slytherin than him. She then told him that he would never be Lord Slytherin, and that he would never have the respect of the other snakes the way I will," he replied.

"It's no wonder he was in such a temper then," Emma commented, smiling when Orion opened his eyes and grinned at her.

"Yes. Mind you, he killed her after that, couldn't stand being abandoned I think. Anyway, how about we get back to what we were

discussing."

After another hour, Daniel and Rose left as it was getting on for dinner time and they didn't want to be too late home. Charles and Emma also left, leaving Orion alone with Noddy. Needing to distract himself from re-examining how the day had gone, he decided to do some more Horcrux research. Progress had been frustratingly slow on locating both the cup and the diary; due to the fact that he and his team were usually called on to help repel Death Eater attacks. There had been no raids for a few weeks though, as Voldemort was preoccupied with discovering the true identity of the Unspeakable who had managed to duel him to a standstill. Flipping open an ancient, dusty book, Orion began to take notes.

The rest of the year passed quickly and soon Severus and Remus were home for the summer holidays. They'd got their final grades and Orion was very pleased with them. Both boys were at the top or near top of all their classes, along with James, Sirius and Lily. For the second year running, Severus had come top in Potions, while Remus had moved up a place in Defence against the Dark Arts, coming fourth as opposed to the previous year's fifth. The five Marauders were all in the top ten places of all the classes they were taking, which pleased all their parents.

The Marauders, on the other hand, all wanted to know about the preliminary rounds, which necessitated an afternoon spent at Marauder Manor with Orion showing his memories of the preliminaries, which suitably impressed the five twelve-year-olds. Orion himself was watching his own performance and silently noting areas where he could improve. Sirius, who had brought his father along with him, spoke up at the end of the memories.

"Mr Potter, could you and Dad have a duel – we all want to know which one of you would win?" he said.

"And then perhaps one between you and Dad," James added,

looking eagerly between Orion and Charles.

The older wizards looked at each other and then shrugged. "I'm game if you are," Orion said.

Orion Black and Charles both shook their heads. "I'm afraid we can't do it now boys, we'd need time to prepare," Charles said.

As the Marauders' faces fell, Orion Black added, "However, we could do it next year, at the Tournament. It won't be a Tournament task; it would be just for fun."

"Cool," the boys cheered. The adults looked at each other, amused, although Orion noticed that his fellow Tournament candidate was staring at him calculatingly. When the Black patriarch noticed his scrutiny, he looked away.

In August, the full moon shone down, bathing the front garden of Marauder Manor with silvery light. James, Sirius and Severus watched from the safety of Severus' bedroom as Moony and Shadow mock-fought, before Moony sprang away and headed for the nearby forest. The young werewolf stopped abruptly and backed towards the safety of the house as a large werewolf walked towards him. The wolf stopped as Shadow lunged forward, putting himself between his cub and the stranger.

The strange wolf stopped and he and Shadow eyed each other warily. The other wolf was well aware that he was on Shadow's territory and that Shadow was the resident alpha. He tilted his head to the side and then sat down, showing no aggressive intent towards Moony.

Finally Shadow walked forward and growled, "Why are you here?"

The strange wolf tilted his head to the side and replied, "I mean you and your cub no harm. I and my pack recently took over the territory which includes this forest. I was on patrol when I sensed you and

came to investigate.

Shadow stopped growling and considered what his visitor was saying. He knew that any human listeners would hear only yips, whines or growls. Finally he said, "I own the territory starting from the edge of the forest and the grounds of the house. I'm sure we can come to some arrangement whereby we can coexist peaceably. You are aware that I'm not a normal wolf?"

The werewolf growled before replying, "I am aware you are a wizard who has transformed into a wolf, yes. You don't smell the same as a normal wolf. I was only interested in meeting you. I would never attack a cub, although I understand why you got that impression."

Shadow pricked his ears up. "Is your pack large?"

"Fairly large. Why?"

"Because Moony could use more friends who understand this side of him. His friends and family support him, but he does need others like him to help him fully accept his wolf side."

The werewolf gave a wolfish grin. "I and my pack would be pleased to help you. May we visit when we are all in human form?"

Shadow gave an affirmative bark. "Yes. Come to the house tomorrow."

The werewolf growled an affirmation and bounded away. As the wolf disappeared into the forest, Shadow relaxed. He sensed Moony coming up beside him and turned, licking him reassuringly. He looked up towards Severus' window and saw three faces staring at the scene in shock. He shook his head and howled, hearing Moony join in a few seconds later. As they stopped, they heard a distant howling start as the werewolf pack replied to them. Shadow and Moony looked at each other before joining in once again.

The next morning, a knock came at the front door. Severus, James and Sirius had all gone to Potter Manor where they could fly without the risk of being seen by Muggles. It gave Orion and Remus time to entertain their visitor as well.

Orion opened the door, seeing a tall, well-built man with brown hair which was going grey at the temples, and piercing golden eyes standing on the step. The man eyed Orion with polite interest, before his gaze fell on Remus, who was standing a bit behind his father and looking nervous at being near an alpha werewolf.

"Hello," Orion said smoothly, offering his hand for his visitor to shake. "I'm Orion Potter, and this is my son, Remus. Please, come in."

His visitor shook his hand and followed him in, sitting on one of the chairs when they reached the living room. Orion and Remus sat down opposite him on the couch.

The man spoke first. "I am Devon Halcyon. I apologise for my intrusion last night, however I felt I had to at least make contact with you to find out who the cub was that I could sense on the edge of the forest."

He looked directly at Remus, who promptly tried to burrow deeper into his father's side. He had never met another werewolf other than the one who had bitten him, and Devon's aura was very much that of an alpha. Moony instinctively tried to both submit to the alpha in front of him and also hide behind Orion.

Orion and Devon noticed this at the same time and Orion growled slightly at Devon, who immediately reined in his aura. He had come here to introduce himself and possibly begin a friendship, not to scare Remus, which he was doing rather effectively.

"Remus, I'm not going to hurt you," he said, letting his werewolf

magic surround the frightened boy. Remus took several deep breaths, calming down slowly as he sensed that the alpha in front of him was only curious and didn't wish to harm him.

After an initially awkward start, Orion began asking general questions about werewolves and what life was like living in a pack. As Devon calmly answered every question, Remus relaxed and then ventured a question of his own.

"You mentioned that you transform without the moon as well, that you can transform during the day. Isn't it dangerous, I mean, do you have control of your wolf side?"

Devon tilted his head to the side; much like his wolf form had done the night before. "Have you transformed during the day?"

Remus looked uneasily at Orion, who answered for him. "He transformed once during the day a few years ago. He lost control of it though, and almost attacked his brother, cousin and friend. I managed to stop him but it was frightening for him. Since that time, he and I have worked on daytime transformations during the holidays to try and get him to both control Moony and accept him as well."

"Accept him?" Devon asked, a confused frown appearing on his face.

Remus looked embarrassed as he answered. "I was bitten by Fenrir Greyback when I was four. Since then, my parents left me with my aunt, who called me a monster and chained me in the basement on the full moon, and then later on she abandoned me. Fortunately, my father adopted me, and while he's accepted me and runs with me on the full moon, I'm still having trouble accepting that Moony isn't a monster, that he isn't something to be feared."

Devon nodded. "I see. The first thing you need to know is that consciously separating your human side from your wolf side, and thinking of them as two separate personas, is counter-productive. To

be able to achieve a daylight transformation and be able to retain your mind while you do so, you need to join the two. Moony isn't separate from you, he is you. Much as an animagus' animal form reflects their personality, Moony is a reflection of you as well. He is part of you and always will be. Once you stop fighting him, you should find the transformations aren't as painful. They will still hurt, because your body is changing shape, but it won't hurt as much. You will also still transform on the full moon, but if you change the moment you see the moonlight, it should be easier, and you can retain your human mind as well."

Remus was frowning as he struggled to understand what Devon was saying. He thought about it, and then said, "So, it's OK, being what we are?"

Devon nodded. "It is society's view of us that has to change, not us. Most of us have never hurt a human. The alphas of each pack keep firm control of their members too, if a werewolf accidentally bites someone, the cub is found and brought to the pack, to be raised as a werewolf. It is easier for werewolves who are part of a pack to understand their wilder side, although your father has done a good job so far," he said, nodding to Orion.

"Is there anything I can do to help him further?" Orion asked with a frown.

Devon looked at him and then said, "Are there any other members of your family around?"

Orion shook his head. "No, Severus went to his cousin's house, along with their friend. We're safe if you wish to transform."

Devon nodded. "I do. I think I can help Remus learn to accept Moony, if you don't mind me just coming into your home and taking over that is."

Orion spread his hands out. "I don't mind. I've done as much as I can, I love Remus, and I will always support and love him, regardless of the fact that he turns into a wolf once a month, but I am aware that he does need help from others like him. I'm grateful that you offered."

Devon smiled at him. "It's my pleasure. Now, you might want to transform as well, just in case."

Orion immediately transformed, becoming Shadow, and sitting down, looking expectantly at Devon. Remus looked between Devon and Orion, and then his eyes widened as he realized what the two men expected him to do.

"No, I, I can't," he said, backing up, fear overwhelming him. Shadow immediately transformed back and Remus flew into his arms.

"What's wrong, cub," Orion murmured softly. Devon stood back, and silently observed the interaction. He wondered why Remus was so upset, even if he had accidentally transformed once and tried to attack his family, Orion had mentioned that they'd worked on further transformations since. Once Remus had calmed down, Orion led him back to the couch and sat down.

"What's wrong?" Orion asked again, determined to get some answers.

Remus looked up at his father, and then over at Devon, before answering softly, "I'm just afraid that, well, because of last night, I don't want you two fighting over me."

"Fighting over – ah I see," Devon mused. Looking directly at both Orion and Remus, he said, "Last night, Remus, I was a stranger intruding on your father's territory, and he thought I was a threat to you. Today, I'm not a stranger, he invited me here, and I'm going to help you with Moony."

Orion nodded in agreement. "He's right, Remus. There won't be any fights, except maybe a mock one, like the ones that you and I have. Play, not serious, OK?"

Remus nodded, relaxing slowly. When he was fully relaxed, Orion arched an eyebrow at Devon. "Shall we try that again?" he said.

Devon nodded and shrugged off his robe before taking off his boots. Standing barefoot and clothed in shirt and trousers, he waited patiently for his hosts to ready themselves. Remus stripped off so he was dressed much like Devon, while Orion transformed into Shadow and waited.

Devon and Remus sat down on the floor opposite each other and Remus looked towards Devon for guidance while stroking his father's furry head.

"OK, Remus, the first thing I want you to do is look inward," Devon instructed, using the method that he used with the cubs of his own pack, as it was the most effective one to use. As Remus closed his eyes, Devon looked down at Shadow and murmured, "He'll be fine."

Shadow thumped his tail on the floor, willing to trust Devon because he was there to help if things did go wrong. He watched as Remus frowned in concentration, and then asked, "Now what?"

Devon smiled, Remus was a fast learner. Most werewolf cubs, when in human form, didn't get this step so quickly. "Can you feel Moony?" he asked, still keeping his voice soft so as not to intrude on Remus' concentration too much.

"Yeah, I can feel him. It's like he's caged, he wants to get out," Remus answered. "Does the full moon unlock the cage?"

"In a manner of speaking," Devon answered. "To make the transformations less painful, you have to let Moony out of the cage,

and let him become part of you, become your wild side which comes out on the full moon but isn't otherwise caged."

Remus frowned as he examined the mental cage which was holding Moony back. Standing outside the cage, he examined his wolf self, noticing the pent-up energy, and then he understood. The transformation was painful not just because of the physical transformation from human to wolf, but all of Moony's energy was let out at once as well. Shaking his head, he surfaced from his meditation, and asked, "How do I release him?"

Devon smiled at him. "Open the cage. It will respond to you. Let him out, you'll feel yourself transform. Let it happen, and once you've changed into Moony, talk to him, tell him that you're in charge."

Remus looked at Devon with a puzzled expression but obediently closed his eyes once again. He stood in front of the cage and reached for the door, frowning when Moony surged forward.

"Back," he said firmly. Moony stared at him and then grudgingly backed away from the door, allowing Remus to open it. As Moony leapt out of the cage, Remus felt his body start to transform. Remembering what Devon had said, he tried to relax and go with it, but it was difficult. Moony was very strong, and didn't like being caged.

Back in the lounge, Shadow and Devon watched as Remus transformed into Moony. It took a few minutes and then the young werewolf lay panting on the ground. Shadow nudged him and he sat up.

Devon had transformed into his own wolf form, nicknamed Silver for the silver stripe that ran from between his ears to the end of his nose. He sat back, watching as Shadow invited Moony to play and the cub leapt at his father, knocking him over. The two wolves rolled on the ground, wrestling each other until Shadow eventually won. Moony

stared up at him and then whined, something in his eyes flickering as he struggled to throw Shadow off.

Shadow backed off, recognizing that something was going on with Moony. He sat down, whining softly. Silver sat down next to him.

"It will be fine. His human self is battling his wolf self both for control and to try and merge. Let him be."

"Fine," Shadow growled, "but I don't like it. I don't like seeing him hurt."

"He's not hurt, this is something all werewolves have to go through – to accept who and what we are," Silver replied.

Shadow kept his eyes on Moony as the cub lay down, whimpering as he occasionally shook his head or sneezed. Deciding to help as much as he could, Shadow moved closer to Moony and lay down beside him. Silver came up on Moony's other side, their presence helping to calm the agitated young werewolf. The three wolves were silent apart from the occasional whimpers from Moony as he fought with Remus, who was stronger than Moony remembered.

"I am in charge," Remus growled mentally at his wolf self.

"I've been in charge when we're like this before," Moony snarled back.

"We are one, we are the same. Only one of us can be in charge. We have to merge, and then we'll both be in charge, because we're the same," Remus argued.

Moony stopped growling and thought about it. "We become one, you have control but listen to me?" he asked.

Remus frowned, as he worked out what Moony was asking, and then

his expression cleared. "Yes. I need to be in control so we don't hurt our pack members, or other humans."

"But they're food," Moony whined.

Remus tried to emulate the stern look Orion used with him and Severus when they whined at him. He leveled it at Moony and was startled when Moony immediately lay down and whimpered.

'Huh, I guess Dad really does know what he's doing,' Remus thought. Aloud he said, "OK, um, we could sort of merge now, if you want to."

Moony growled his agreement. He was tired of fighting Remus every month; he wanted to have fun, not fight. With an excited yelp, he bounded at Remus. The two merged, becoming one.

As they merged, Remus felt the wolf becoming part of him but it still felt wrong to him. Thinking furiously of the animagus transformation, he tried to force Moony to become an animagus, rather than his true werewolf form.

In the lounge, both Shadow and Silver were startled when Moony gave a loud howl and then collapsed, falling silent.

Transforming back, Devon and Orion knelt on either side of the young werewolf, running their hands over his body to check for injuries. Finding none, Orion stared at Devon.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

Devon had his eyes closed as he scanned Remus, his magic finding Remus' easily. He frowned as he sensed what the problem was, and opened his eyes again.

"Oh, Remus, you silly cub," he muttered, gently patting Moony's head.

"I'll thank you not to insult my son in front of me," Orion growled. "What's wrong?"

Devon opened his eyes and looked directly into Orion's. "He took what I said about Moony being part of him the way an animagus' animal form is part of them too literally. He still hasn't fully accepted Moony as a werewolf, and when they merged, he tried to force Moony to be an animagus form, rather than accepting that Moony is, and always will be, a werewolf. As this happened, his magic twisted his inherent werewolf magic which all werewolves have, into something which resembles a tangled ball of wool. In essence, Remus tried to change from being a werewolf to being a wolf animagus, and it has only partially worked because his werewolf magic fought it. Now he's stuck."

"What are you saying?" Orion asked, as icy fingers seemed to close round his heart. Devon gave him a sympathetic look.

"Remus will be stuck in his current form until he fully accepts that he is a werewolf and not an animagus. He has to accept Moony as a werewolf, not as his animagus form, which is what he tried to force Moony to become. Once he accepts this, then the magic should untangle itself and he can change back."

Orion groaned. "But for at least today and possibly tomorrow, he's going to be a wolf."

Devon nodded sympathetically and Orion abruptly transformed and flopped down beside his son, wondering how on earth he was going to deal with this particular problem.

Chapter Twenty Seven: Furry Problems and the Goblet of Fire

Orion sighed as he looked down at Remus, who was still stuck as Moony a week after the accident had occurred. Severus, James, Sirius and Lily were sitting around the lounge, buried in their summer homework and telling Remus what they were doing. Lily had been brought in on Remus' secret when she came to visit Severus and had seen Moony in the front garden. She had blinked a bit, and then promptly told Remus that she didn't mind his furry side at all, in fact, she thought it was fascinating. Although they didn't mind that their friend was a bit furry at the moment, Orion had requested that they be careful around him, as the partial merge and tangled magic had resulted in Moony occasionally wresting control from Remus and snapping at what he thought of as food. They could touch him if they wished, but they weren't allowed to let him lick their faces or hands as werewolf saliva could transmit the lycanthropy illness if it entered their bodies. Orion had also warned Remus that if he tried to bite or otherwise attack anyone, he would be muzzled for a while to teach him not to do that.

Orion shook his head as he watched Severus rubbing behind Moony's ears, and kept an inconspicuous eye on him. While James, Sirius and Lily had confined themselves to simply patting Moony occasionally, Severus was a different matter. Orion knew that Severus wanted some werewolf fur, saliva, and blood to experiment with, and so he kept a careful watch on him. He wouldn't put it past his young potions master to try and harvest some ingredients from his brother while he could, despite the inherent danger and despite the fact that Orion had specifically forbidden him from any such attempt.

After lunch, which the three visitors had stayed for, Orion had helped with difficult homework questions and offered advice on which elective classes were good and which weren't, as the Marauders had received their Hogwarts letters for their third year along with the list of elective classes they could choose from. Severus looked at Remus

speculatively when their father disappeared to his study to fetch a book on Ancient Runes for beginners to show Lily when she expressed an interest in the subject.

"What are you thinking about, Sev?" James asked curiously.

"Only Dad is allowed to call me that," Severus growled. He had recently come to dislike that particular shortening of his name from everyone except Orion. As he thought of it, his father had privileges when it came to him that no one else did, and that included shortening his name.

"Fine," James muttered. "Could you answer the question?"

Severus sighed. "I was thinking of researching a possible cure for lycanthropy. I realise that we're only twelve but I've been reading ahead and I think I could begin the initial stages now. The only problem is that I need some ingredients to experiment on."

"Ingredients like what?" Lily enquired, sounding suspicious as Severus knelt by Moony and rubbed the fur on the back of his neck.

"Like fur and things like that," Severus replied casually as he produced a small pair of scissors and several vials. As he held some of his brother's fur and prepared to cut it, Moony realised what he was going to do.

With a snarl, Moony stood up, sending the vials and the scissors flying. Severus fell over and scrambled towards the couch to avoid the angry werewolf's teeth. As Moony lunged towards him, Severus felt himself flying backwards and then he hit a solid object. One arm came around him to hold him still while several spells were thrown at Moony, knocking him out and restraining him. With Moony unconscious, the tension drained out of the room, and Severus found himself released and turned round so that he was looking up into the shocked and annoyed eyes of his father.

"What did you think you were doing?" Orion asked softly, but with an edge to his tone which told Severus that his father was seriously annoyed with him. He looked at the vials and the scissors and sighed.

"I was attempting to collect ingredients from Moony," he admitted, looking away from Orion, and towards the restrained, unconscious werewolf on the floor.

"Why?" Orion said, sounding less annoyed and more curious now that the danger was past. He was still annoyed that Severus had attempted something so dangerous but he wanted to know the reasons behind the attempt at ingredient collection and he wouldn't get them if he didn't approach the issue calmly.

"He was thinking of trying to find a cure for lycanthropy. We thought that Moony wouldn't mind, he hasn't been vicious or dangerous at all today," James spoke up, not liking seeing his cousin get in trouble.

Orion sighed and sat down on the couch. "Listen to me, all of you," he said firmly. "Moony is not fully wild, as Remus has control over him most of the time, but due to the failed merge, he does not have complete control. He is not a tame werewolf, and he can still be dangerous, as you just found out."

He stared hard at Severus, before saying in a low, serious, tone, "I have no wish to see any of you infected simply because you forgot who and what you were dealing with. No matter how much Moony might look like a tame wolf, and no matter the fact that he is your friend, you must not forget that he is a werewolf, and therefore, you need to take the proper precautions when he is in his wolf form. Am I understood?"

Four nods answered him, and he nodded back. "Right. Now, James, Sirius, Lily, I need a private word with Severus, so if you wouldn't

mind taking your homework outside for a little while, I'd appreciate it."

"You're not kicking us out?" Sirius asked, astounded.

Orion smiled slightly. "No. You didn't do anything wrong. I do need privacy though, so if you wouldn't mind..."

The visitors took the hint and gathered up their belongings, relocating to the front garden, all of them looking towards the lounge from time to time. Eventually they settled back into their work, but they all wondered exactly what was going on in the lounge. Even James, who knew that his uncle would never lay a finger on his cousins, was worried about them.

In the lounge, Orion had asked Remus to wait in the kitchen so he could speak with Severus privately. When Remus had disappeared, he started to speak, stopped, and then ran a hand through his hair in frustration. Finally, he sat on the couch and glared at Severus, who was doing his best to avoid his father's gaze and not managing it very well.

"What on earth were you thinking, Severus?" he began. Not giving his son time to answer, he continued, "You could have been seriously hurt. I know you want to collect ingredients to experiment with, and I'm glad you're thinking about possibly creating a cure for lycanthropy but you're only twelve years old. You don't yet have the knowledge or the skills to even begin to create something as complex as that would be. And while I understand the lure of having access to werewolf fur whenever you like, Remus is your brother, he's not a living source of ingredients for you."

Severus had let his head drop further and further as Orion scolded him. When his father seemed to be finished, he looked up and said, "But Dad, it wouldn't have hurt him – it would just be like us getting a haircut. I didn't need much, just a couple of bits of fur, and some of his saliva. I thought that it would be easy to collect – I didn't think he'd

try to attack me."

Orion sighed. "Severus, when it comes to harvesting ingredients from live sources, you need to respect the source first and foremost. You wouldn't attempt to take a unicorn's blood by force, or harvest other plants at the wrong time of year, would you? This is no different. Yes, you would have used the fur for a good purpose, but you're getting ahead of yourself. If you really want to try and create a cure now, then I suggest that you get a qualified Potions Master to help you. Master Sorenson seems to like you; I think he'd help if you asked."

"But I want to do it myself, if I got him to help then he'd get all the credit," Severus muttered, scowling at the floor. Orion had to repress a smile; he couldn't afford to relent just yet.

"I don't think so, and anyway, you wouldn't create it in just a week or two, it would take years," he said.

Severus looked up then, and said, "Dad, I, well, I'm sorry for what happened but I didn't know he would react like that."

"How would you feel if someone tried to cut your hair without permission?" was the response, which caused Severus to scowl again and run a hand through his own hair, glancing at Remus as he did so.

"I suppose," he muttered, followed by, "Am I in trouble?"

Orion arched an eyebrow. "What do you think?"

Severus stared at him. "You never specifically said that I couldn't harvest ingredients from Moony?"

Recognising the attempt for what it was, Orion responded, "You seem to have a selective memory, Severus, for I distinctly remember

telling you exactly that."

Severus hung his head once more, knowing that his father was right. Sighing deeply, he muttered, "So what are you planning on doing?"

Orion smiled slightly. "You are going to write me an essay on werewolves, or more specifically, the dangers inherent in harvesting ingredients from them, and the possible consequences if the harvesting process goes wrong. By consequences, I mean consequences for both the harvester and the werewolf. I expect it to be done by the end of the holidays. You are also grounded for the rest of the week. I suggest you finish the rest of your homework, and then begin that essay."

"What about James, Sirius and Lily," Severus protested.

"You can finish the rest of your homework with them, but when they go home today, you will not be allowed to see them until next week," Orion said, relenting a tiny bit. Severus nodded, and quickly stood up, gathering his books and bits of parchment. He saw the vials and scissors still on the floor and hesitated.

"Accio vials and scissors," Orion said, and Severus watched them fly into his father's grasp. He was turning to go outside when Remus came trotting in from the kitchen in response to Orion calling him.

Kneeling beside his brother Severus patted his head and said, "Sorry, Remus," before going outside, grateful that he was permitted the rest of the afternoon, however short it might be, to be with his friends. He had a feeling that Remus would not be shown the same leniency, no matter how small it was.

Left alone with their father, Remus watched Severus go outside and then looked up at Orion and whined.

"That look isn't going to work," Orion said firmly, as Remus laid his

head on his knee, looking up at him with large eyes.

In Godric's Hollow, the five spirits had watched the scene with interest, and in the case of Severus and Remus, amusement mixed with apprehension. They had groaned when Severus attempted to harvest some fur, and then sunk back into the couch when Moony had attacked him in response.

"Oh dear," Severus muttered when Orion rescued his younger self.

"I think our younger selves are in trouble," Remus murmured, covering his face with his hands and then looking through his fingers at the screen in front of them.

"And here I thought that Harry was going to be happy with them," was Severus' sarcastic reply.

Sirius, James and Lily watched their friends with amusement. Privately, they thoroughly approved of the way that Orion was handling the situation, although out loud they sympathised with their friends and teased them a little bit.

Back in the living room, Orion looked sternly at Remus. "I understand that you had a right to stop Severus from cutting off your fur without your permission," he stated. As Moony's ears pricked up, Orion growled slightly and continued, "However, you shouldn't have attacked him the way you did." He watched as Moony's ears immediately drooped in response to the stern tone, before saying, "At the most, you should have moved away from him at first, and then, if he continued, you could have growled at him to tell him to stop. Attacking him was not the right response, and I can't permit you to think that it is."

As Moony whimpered, trying to apologise, Orion patted his head. "I know you're sorry, Remus, but just as Severus is grounded for disobeying my instructions regarding collecting potions ingredients

from you, you need to be punished for trying to attack him. It wouldn't be fair to punish one of you and not the other when you both disobeyed my instructions."

Remus dropped his head to the floor and tucked his tail between his legs. He knew he'd acted wrongly, but he'd just reacted, without thinking first. He heard a sigh from up above him and felt his father's hand slide under his chin, lifting his head up.

"You are also grounded for the rest of the week, but you will spend the rest of the afternoon in your room," Orion said firmly. Remus whimpered again, but more was to come. Before he could move away, he felt his father hold his head still and then something was slid over his jaws and buckled securely behind his ears. He pawed at the muzzle, trying to get it off and looked pleadingly up at Orion, who stared back, seeming completely unmoved.

"You'll wear that until dinnertime, to remind you that trying to attack and bite people isn't allowed, no matter the provocation," Orion stated before leading Remus up to his room and shutting the door but not locking it. He went back downstairs after setting a couple of monitoring spells on Remus' room. The muzzle wouldn't harm him, but Orion didn't want Remus trying to harm himself in an effort to get it off.

In the middle of the following week, during the evening, Shadow and Moony were outside awaiting the arrival of Devon's pack. Silver trotted out of the trees, followed by the rest of his pack, which halted while Silver and Shadow greeted each other and then all the werewolves congregated on the front lawn as Shadow introduced Moony to them. Although Devon's immediate family had met Moony before he'd been grounded the previous week, the rest of the pack hadn't and they were very curious about the young werewolf. Moony, after initially greeting Silver and his family, had hidden behind Shadow as the other adults moved towards him. It took one of the cubs bounding forward and trying to entice him into a game for

Moony to leave Shadow's protection, though he still looked back at his father to ask permission. Shadow gave a brief bark and Moony went with the other cub while Shadow greeted the rest of the pack.

The night went well, and when the morning came, the members of the pack transformed back to human again. Remus tried to do the same, but no matter how much he tried, he couldn't manage it. He lay down at Orion's feet and growled, utterly frustrated at his situation. He knew what he had to do to achieve a transformation back to human form, but as much as he had enjoyed being part of the pack the previous night, he still didn't think of Moony as a werewolf.

Orion knelt and rubbed Remus' head while explaining to one of Remus' new friends that he was stuck in his wolf form and couldn't transform back. The other cubs sat down around him, and began trying to help him, transforming into their wolf forms and back again, thinking that Remus was just having trouble with the transformation. It was inconceivable to them that he couldn't accept what he was, but they eventually wandered off when all their efforts were in vain. Their parents, having grasped the situation more fully, came to see if they could help, and Orion watched and listened with as much fascination as Remus as they explained the origins of werewolves, and how being a werewolf had a lot of advantages. He sensed Severus come up behind him, and put an arm round his shoulders as they listened.

In Godric's Hollow, the spirits were listening with as much fascination as Orion. Remus hadn't discovered this information until he was much older, and he sat there, watching as his younger self thumped his tail occasionally on the ground in response to something one of the adult werewolves had said. Severus, James, Lily and Sirius were silent as well, not wanting to miss a moment of the events which were unfolding in front of them.

"Will your younger self ever turn back into his human form?" Sirius asked.

Remus shrugged. "I know I wrestled with accepting Moony for a long time, Sirius, and never truly managed it, but that was because I didn't have you with me until Hogwarts. My younger self should have an easier time, but it appears that it won't be anytime soon unless something drastic happens." He fell silent, wishing that he could possess his younger self for a brief time and help untangle the magic within him. Although Orion had explained the situation to them, Remus couldn't help overly much as he'd never heard of a werewolf trying to force their wolf self to be an animagus form before. This was completely new territory for him. He had given Orion some advice on how to cope with his younger self while he was stuck as Moony, that advice mainly being showing Moony that Orion was still in charge, was still his father, and that the normal household rules still applied. He also said that while friendly behaviour should be encouraged, jumping up and licking people's faces should be firmly discouraged, which was advice that Orion had duly passed on to visitors such as the rest of the Marauders, as well as Charles and Emma who had immediately dropped round when they'd heard about the situation.

The pack was just about to leave when a loud growl was heard and a large wolf leapt at Orion, intent on killing him. Orion, having heard the growl, immediately transformed into Shadow, completing the transformation a split second before the wolf landed on top of him and sank its teeth into his shoulder.

Recognising the wolf as Fenrir Greyback, Shadow threw the rogue werewolf off of him and regained his feet, putting himself between Moony and Greyback, while snarling in anger. Greyback ignored him, turning his attention to the other werewolves and killing two cubs before several adult pack members, including Silver, leapt on him, trying to tear him to shreds.

Greyback squirmed out of the pile and leapt over Shadow and then right over top of Moony before heading for the manor at a fast run. Shadow ran after him, growling in fury as the intruder smashed through the lounge window and made his way up the stairs. Severus,

having heard the commotion, was at the top of the stairs. He had his wand in his hand, and was throwing spells at Greyback as the werewolf advanced towards him, growling softly.

Shadow bounded up the stairs and sank his teeth into Greyback's tail, causing the werewolf to stop and howl in pain. Shadow backed down the stairs, pulling the intruder with him, snarling through clenched teeth. At the bottom of the stairs, Greyback turned and tried to fasten his teeth in Shadow's throat, an attempt which Shadow avoided by turning his body out of the way.

Outside, Remus was being prevented from going to his father's aid by two of the pack members, who told him that he was too young to be in such a fight. When Shadow was thrown out the window, landing hard on his side, Remus shook his head. In that moment, looking at his father, and then at the werewolves around him, he understood what they'd been trying to teach him. A slight glow appeared around him as he accepted Moony for what he was – a werewolf. The magic inside him untangled, the knot melting away as though it had never been there.

"Finally," Moony growled inside him.

"Yes, now let's help Dad," Remus answered.

Moony, for that was what Remus still called his inner wolf, went round the adults who were trying to prevent him from helping his family, and ran for the house. He could hear Severus yelling spells from up the top of the stairs and as he leapt through the window, the young werewolf saw that his brother was in danger of being bitten as Greyback was almost on top of him.

Snarling, Moony gathered his strength and bounded up the stairs, crashing into Greyback and sending both of them skidding along the hall. The attack was so unexpected that the older werewolf slid almost to the end of the hall and lay there for a few seconds, stunned.

In those few seconds, Remus concentrated hard and transformed back to himself.

"Severus, run!" he yelled at his stunned brother. "Go to Potter Manor, go anywhere but don't stay here."

"Remus?" Severus said dumbly, staring at him as though he couldn't believe his eyes.

Remus rolled his own eyes, casting worried glances at Greyback who was beginning to rise from the floor. "Yes, idiot, now go! I'll tell you all about it later. Get out of here!"

Severus darted a look at the end of the hall just as Greyback lunged for them. Remus transformed back into Moony, just in time to feel sharp pain as the older werewolf's teeth found his shoulder. With a yelp of pain, he rolled sideways, ending up between Severus and Greyback. Pulling himself shakily to his feet, he growled defiantly while wondering where the hell his father was.

As Greyback prepared to attack Moony and Severus once more, there was a snarl from the direction of the stairs. Severus looked in that direction, as did the two werewolves and they saw Shadow standing at the head of a pack of werewolves, all of whom were growling savagely.

Severus gulped and decided he'd be safer in his bedroom than out in the hall. Retreating hurriedly, he slid inside his bedroom and shut the door, before deciding that he wanted to see what was going on and opening it a little bit.

Greyback turned to face Shadow, growling viciously. "The cub is mine," he snarled.

Shadow shook his head, growling back, "You abandoned him after you bit him. He's my son and you have no right to take him from his

family!"

"We're both werewolves. You couldn't possibly understand our ways," Greyback retorted, advancing towards Shadow, who stood his ground and snarled threateningly.

"Maybe not but I have friends here who will help both Remus and myself with that. You're on my territory; you've threatened my family and my friends. Get out before I kill you."

Greyback didn't bother to reply, instead, he attacked Moony, sinking his teeth into the younger werewolf's scruff and dragging him towards the end of the hall. Moony snarled, and tried to get free, twisting to sink his own teeth into Greyback's chest.

The two werewolves fell over as Shadow jumped on top of Greyback, who had to let Moony go in favour of fighting Shadow. Moony retreated to Severus' bedroom door, lightly scratching at it to request entry while keeping an eye on the fight in front of him. Severus opened his door and pulled his brother inside, whereupon Remus transformed back to his human form and crouched next to Severus, both of them watching the fight.

Greyback and Shadow were locked in combat, both wolves bleeding from various bites and scratches. Greyback's left front leg was broken, and Shadow had a large gash down his right flank. The two separated, and circled each other, panting from exertion. Shadow tensed as Greyback rushed him, even on only three legs, the older werewolf was fast. He dropped his head, going underneath his opponent's charge, and then came up from below. His jaws fastened securely round Greyback's throat, Shadow rose up on his hind legs, lifting Greyback up with him. They teetered in the air for a few seconds before Shadow's momentum allowed him to fall forward, pushing his opponent over on his back. From there it ended quickly as Shadow ripped the older wolf's throat open, killing him instantly.

Once Greyback was dead, Shadow lifted his head and howled, before turning to face Silver and the rest of his pack. Transforming back to human, Orion pulled his wand out and vanished the remains of the dead werewolf, using strong cleaning spells to ensure that every trace of the fight was removed, even the magical traces of violence which could remain in a room for years if it wasn't properly cleansed. With that done, he transformed back to Shadow and walked towards Silver.

"My condolences for your loss. I didn't expect this to happen," he said.

Silver looked at him for a moment before shaking his head and replying, "I know, and thank you. See to your family, and we will see to ours. I will see you again sometime."

"You know where we are. Stay safe," Shadow replied, watching as Silver led his pack out of the house and towards their home. He waited for a moment, and then transformed back to human, before knocking on Severus' door.

"Severus, Remus are you alright?" he called out.

Severus opened the door and nodded, blocking Orion's view of the room for a moment. "We're fine, Dad, but Remus has something to tell you," he said. As Orion frowned, not sure what Severus meant, Remus walked into view, and both boys had the satisfaction of seeing their father looked utterly shocked.

"Remus," Orion half-whispered, almost unable to believe his eyes. Remus took a few steps forward and hugged him tightly. Orion stood still for a few seconds, and then suddenly returned the hug so tightly that Remus had difficulty breathing. They stood that way for a few minutes before Orion invited Severus into a group hug, which lasted even longer.

"Dad, are you alright?" Severus asked once the hug had ended. He eyed Orion's wounds with concern. "You won't transform, right, I mean, you're not like Remus now?"

"No, I won't transform into a werewolf," Orion answered, having cleaned his wounds and healed all but the deepest ones in a few minutes. He carefully checked Remus' wounds, finding that his enhanced healing capabilities had already taken care of most of them. He cleaned the few that were left and healed them before hugging Remus once more.

"Hey, Dad, have you signed our Hogsmeade forms yet?" Severus asked to try and get everyone's minds off recent events.

Orion stared at him, and then shook his head. "Not yet. I'll do it later, once we've all had a chance to recover from what's happened over the last week. I think we ought to all go downstairs and just, well, relax a bit."

Severus and Remus preceded him down the stairs, and as Orion followed them, he turned round and cast several more spells just to ensure that everything was normal. Finding nothing amiss, he continued down the stairs, rotating his shoulders and neck to loosen tight muscles and listening to Remus and Severus telling their friends that Remus was back to normal. Sinking onto the couch, he summoned a glass and a bottle of firewhiskey. After pouring a generous amount into the glass he banished the bottle back to the cabinet. By the time the two boys had finished their Floo calls, Noddy had provided two hot chocolates for them, as Orion refused to serve them any form of alcohol. Tipping his head back and closing his eyes, he hoped that nothing else happened before the start of their third year at Hogwarts.

Two months later, the Maruaders were excitedly and impatiently waiting with the rest of the student body for the arrival of the eighteen Triwizard Tournament candidates. The French and Bulgarian

candidates were the first to arrive, and then the British candidates showed up. The Marauders had to work to restrain their cheers when they saw that Orion Potter and Orion Black were part of the candidates and muttered under their breath when they saw Abraxas Malfoy as well.

"Hopefully our fathers will be the two British competitors, we can't have a Malfoy representing Britain," Sirius muttered, glaring at Lucius when he smirked at them.

"We agree," James, Severus, and Remus replied, before going to greet their father and uncle eagerly. Sirius shook his head before going to greet his own father.

The candidates and students took their seats in the Great Hall where the Goblet of Fire was set up. Orion looked at it with distaste, he had made it into the top six, but his memories of the last Triwizard Tournament were overshadowing what should be a fun competition. Smiling grimly, he wrote his name and country on a piece of parchment, before getting up and walking towards the goblet. As he walked round the table, he muttered to himself, "At least this time I'm entering it legally." He didn't realise that his comment had been overheard and didn't see the puzzled looks directed towards him by the Marauders, as they put their heads together and began to whisper about what he could have meant.

A week later, when all the submissions had been made, the Great Hall was full once again, as everyone wanted to know who would be chosen. The Bulgarian competitors were chosen first, Aleksandar Krum, who Orion surmised was either Viktor Krum's father or grandfather, and Damyan Avramov. They walked up towards the head table and disappeared into the room behind it, their passage marked with polite applause. Then the two French competitors were chosen, Louise and Sophie. Their last names Orion wasn't even going to try and pronounce, for fear of accidentally offending them by mangling them.

Then it was time for the British competitors to be chosen and the entire hall held their breath. Orion Potter and Orion Black exchanged a friendly look, before both glaring at Abraxas Malfoy, who had been heard to say that of course he would be chosen – he was a pureblood.

The Goblet shot a flame into the air, and Dumbledore caught the parchment as it floated down towards him. "Abraxas Malfoy," he announced, and the Slytherin students erupted in cheers, while Lucius Malfoy sent a very smug look towards the Marauders, who glared at him and immediately began plotting a series of humiliating pranks to use on him.

As Dumbledore unfolded the last piece of parchment, his eyes widened, and then he looked at the Marauders. "Orion Potter," he said slowly, and the Gryffindor table exploded in cheers, while the Slytherins clapped politely. Severus had discreetly passed it round that his father was of the Slytherin line, though which line he didn't say.

As Orion rose from his seat and walked up the aisle towards the head table he reflected on how different it was than last time. Last time, there hadn't been the cheering and clapping there was now, he'd been labelled a cheat and a liar. This time though, he'd earned his place in the tournament, and he was intent on winning it.

"Take a look at Professor Dumbledore," James whispered to Remus, who quietly nudged Severus and pointed towards the headmaster. Dumbledore was currently speaking quietly to Orion, who was slowly losing his cheerful expression. Orion answered a question curtly before turning and striding past Dumbledore, who glared at his back for a second before pasting a smile on his face and turning to address the crowded hall.

"I knew there was a problem between Professor Dumbledore and

Dad, but wow, they really seem to dislike each other," Severus said, shocked. Remus, James, and Sirius nodded dumbly, not sure what to think of the apparent feud between Orion and Dumbledore.

"Do you know what it's about?" Sirius asked both Severus and Remus.

They looked at each other before shaking their heads. "No," Remus answered slowly. "He told us that there was some problem between himself and the future version of Dumbledore, which Professor Dumbledore has exacerbated, but he didn't say what."

Sirius looked confused. "In English please?" he requested.

Remus rolled his eyes. "Dumbledore, both now and in the future, hurt Dad badly and that's why he doesn't like the Headmaster. He didn't tell us exactly what it was though."

Sirius nodded, satisfied with the answer, and turned away from his friends when his father sat down next to him.

"Are you OK, Dad?" he asked.

Orion Black looked down at his eldest son. "Yes, I'm fine Sirius. I wish Leo all the best, and will be cheering him on in the tournament. How is Regulus settling in?"

Sirius scowled at the mention of his younger brother, who had been Sorted into Slytherin that year. "He seems to be OK; you'd have to ask Severus for any specifics. He won't talk to me, says that Gryffindors and Slytherins shouldn't mix for any reason," he said stiffly.

His father frowned. "I see," he said. "Very well, I'll speak with Regulus myself." He was about to say more when the door behind the head table opened and the six Triwizard competitors emerged. Orion was

wearing a thoughtful frown, and kept glancing at Abraxas, who was alternately frowning at him and then at their competition. The French and Bulgarian competitors, by contrast, seemed to be discussing something in their own pairs and didn't appear to be worried about the Tournament ahead.

Orion sat down with the Marauders and sighed. "The first task will be next month and we're not being told what it is," he said tightly.

"What about Malfoy?" Remus asked.

"He was trying to rattle me, telling me that I didn't have a hope of winning because I was a half-blood up against five pure-bloods," Orion replied with a frown.

"What a jerk. What did you say?" Severus burst out indignantly.

Orion smirked at him before replying, "I told him that I had the advantage because I wasn't an inbred idiot with an inferiority complex. He didn't like that."

Orion Black snorted. "I imagine he didn't. Be careful around him, Leo, he's not someone you want to make an enemy of."

Orion inclined his head. "I know, but I think we both understand that this sort of sparring is part of the competition. He didn't seem too offended, more amused than anything else. His parting shot was something along the lines of he's going to win but he expects me to be second so that Britain can claim the top two places."

Orion Black looked startled and then laughed. "That sounds like him. All the same, do be careful. I rather like our own sparring matches, and we still have to have that duel."

"Of course," Orion replied.

"Uncle Orion, do you think that you can win?" James asked eagerly.

Orion smiled at him and gently tugged the unruly black hair. "I hope so, but whatever happens, I think this year will prove to be very eventful."

Chapter Twenty-Eight: The First Task and Overheard Conversations

As September passed into October, and the students settled into their school routine, the TriWizard champions familiarized themselves with the layout of the school and prepared as best they could for the first task ahead of them. For Orion and Abraxas, it wasn't so much a case of familiarizing themselves with the castle layout, but revisiting old places of interest, and talking to the portraits. Orion also spent a good deal of time dodging Dumbledore, as the old wizard seemed determined to try and corner him for a chat.

To counter Dumbledore's attempts, Orion retreated outdoors, where he often found the Marauders when the weather was fine. They seemed to seek him out, as James, Severus and Remus all enjoyed the chance to talk to him without having to do it through letters. Sirius also joined them on occasion, although if it was family matters they were discussing, he would leave and catch up on schoolwork. One afternoon, when they were all settled under the trees, Severus idly threw a rock into the lake and said, "Dad, what do you think the first task will be?"

Orion sighed. "I don't know," he admitted, "and that makes me nervous. The last time I competed in this tournament, the first task was getting past a dragon."

"A dragon! How old were you?" James spluttered, ignoring the glare that Severus directed at him for interrupting.

Orion smiled. "It was the school version of this tournament, and it was only supposed to be students seventeen or older that could compete. I was fourteen, and my DADA professor, who was an escaped Death Eater in disguise, managed to cast a powerful charm on the cup so that I would be entered as one of the champions."

"If that's what they call a child-friendly task," Remus said worriedly, "then what will they get for adults?"

"Like I just said, I don't know, but whatever it is, I'll beat it," Orion responded calmly, seeing that the speculation was going to get out of hand very soon. The next question caught him completely off guard as James said innocently,

"Who are you taking to the Yule Ball?"

"The what?" Orion asked weakly, once he'd recovered from his coughing fit.

"The Yule Ball. The champions have to open the dancing and students are allowed to come too," Severus explained.

"Oh, right. I've got someone in mind," Orion responded. He raised an eyebrow and then asked with a grin, "Who are you lot taking?"

The blushes on all of their faces told him the answer, they hadn't got round to asking anyone yet. Finally, James said, "Well, we,"

"Yes," Orion said, snickering internally at the situation.

"We don't know how to ask," Severus finished, looking embarrassed at having to admit it.

"Well, it's quite simple, you go up to a girl, and you ask if they want to go to the ball with you. Why don't you try your friends, they're not likely to laugh at you, or make you feel embarrassed," Orion suggested.

"Is that what you did?" Remus enquired, looking less embarrassed now that a solution for their problem had presented itself.

Orion nodded. "I was just as embarrassed as you are now, believe me," he said, smiling at the memory. "I didn't know who to take, as most of the girls either saw me as a Triwizard champion or as a

celebrity, and I didn't feel like being with a giggly fan-girl all night. I ended up asking my best female friend to the ball, as she wasn't likely to go all giggly on me and we were friends to start with."

"Celebrity? Were you famous in the future?" James asked, jumping on the celebrity bit.

Orion shrugged. "Yes, for reasons which I won't go into now. I hated it, I didn't want to be famous, I wanted to be an ordinary wizard, but no one would let me be that. I was seventeen before I figured out that I would never be normal and I might as well embrace the fame, make it work for me rather than against me."

Severus, Remus and James looked at him, all thoroughly confused, but realizing that they weren't going to get anything else out of him regarding that. Orion noticed their sudden quiet and leaned back against the tree.

"Don't worry about that for now. I do have something that I've been wondering about though," he said, his deliberately casual tone instantly catching the Marauders' interest.

"What?" Severus enquired.

Orion smirked and then said, "Why haven't I seen any Marauder pranks recently?"

"Well," James said hesitantly, "we weren't sure how you'd take it, you know, us playing pranks when we should be working."

"Yeah," Remus added, "it's different with you being here, and not at home, plus there's the tournament on."

Orion chuckled. "Boys, I'm not going to be annoyed if you play a few pranks here and there. As far as I'm concerned, the usual rules apply, if you get caught, the professors will deal with it. I'm not going to

interfere unless you start bullying other students. As long as there are no problems of that nature then everything will be fine."

"How can pranking someone be bullying them?" James asked.

Orion opened one eye, having closed both of them when the sun shone directly into them, and said, "When you start going after someone purely because you don't like them, and when you play pranks on them based solely on that dislike. If I hear of anything like that then you will find that I'll be a lot less lenient on the subject of pranks in general."

"What would you do if you did hear of something like that?" Severus asked.

Orion opened the other eye and said, "You don't want to know."

The three boys looked at each other for a minute, before Remus asked cautiously, "Um, were you a target?"

No answer was forthcoming for a moment, and then Orion sighed and sat up. "Yes, but that wasn't why I said it. My potions professor went to school with my father and his friends, and he was their favorite target. They made his life at Hogwarts a living hell simply because they didn't like him. Twenty years later, I was being blamed for all the things that my father did to him, simply because I looked so much like my father."

"But that's not fair, blaming you for things your dad did," Severus said indignantly. Orion smiled faintly as his son continued, "Couldn't he let go of that rivalry, even after your father was dead?"

Orion shrugged. "Some wounds go too deep to heal completely, Severus, and when the bullying essentially began right at the start of their first year and continued for all seven years – well, that's a lot to get over. He had good reason to hate them, and eventually he did let

it go, the relationship which developed between us in my sixth and seventh years couldn't have happened if he hadn't."

Orion fell silent and so did his audience, all thinking of the information which he'd revealed to them. Finally, Orion checked his watch and then he stood up abruptly. "Oh, Merlin, I'm late," he muttered. "Sorry guys, I have to go, there's a meeting in Hogsmeade that I was supposed to be at two minutes ago. See you later."

He dashed to the gates and disappeared as soon as he was past the anti-apparition wards. James, Severus and Remus were left staring at each other and then at where he'd disappeared.

"I guess we'd better be careful," James said eventually. Severus and Remus nodded somberly. The information that Orion had given them was sobering and they decided that their plan to prank Lucius Malfoy for a month without a break had to be abandoned. They didn't want to be accused of being bullies after all.

Two days after the conversation by the lake, the Marauders were out of bed on one of their night-time adventures. They were quietly setting up a prank by the library when they heard footsteps coming up behind them. Looking around in panic, they spotted an alcove and they all quickly hid in there. It was a tight fit but with the invisibility cloak that James had, they felt reasonably secure that they wouldn't be discovered.

As they peered out of the alcove, they saw Dumbledore come into view. They stiffened; being caught out of bed by a teacher was bad, for that teacher to be the headmaster made the situation even worse. They held their breath and prayed that he wasn't on patrol that night.

Apparently he wasn't. The old wizard seemed to be looking for someone and just as the boys were silently speculating on whom it might be, Orion came round the corner. James, Severus, and Remus went as rigid as statues; they didn't want him catching them out of

bed either. Although he'd practically given them permission to pull pranks, they were sure that he wouldn't approve of them being out of bed when it was past midnight. He tended to be peculiar when it came to bedtimes. Sirius stayed very still as well, although he wasn't part of the Potter family, he did respect Orion and didn't want to annoy him.

Orion stopped as he saw Dumbledore and he sighed deeply. He was tired and wanted nothing more than to go to bed. Apparently, his wish was not to be granted, at least not yet.

"Mr Potter, I'd like to speak with you and you've been dodging all my attempts so far," Dumbledore began.

"I'm dodging your attempts because they inevitably lead to you trying to get me to be a toy soldier for you," Orion said, keeping his voice low and calm through sheer willpower.

Dumbledore narrowed his eyes. "I don't want you to be a toy soldier, I just want us to work together to defeat Voldemort, rather than you doing it alone."

"You want at least part of the glory, that's your only motivation," Orion snapped back, feeling exhausted all of a sudden. Dealing with Dumbledore gave him worse headaches than dealing with Voldemort, and he could feel a migraine approaching rapidly.

"I'm not seeking glory, Mr Potter, I'm seeking an end to the biggest threat our world has seen since Grindelwald," Dumbledore replied, his tone taking on a definite edge.

Orion smirked, he'd hit a nerve somewhere. "Perhaps," he said mildly. "However, your behaviour so far has left me disinclined to cooperate."

Dumbledore scowled and then said, "Enjoy your time with your

children, Mr Potter, in these troubled times one never knows when it might come to an end."

In the small alcove beside the library, the Marauders stood in stunned silence as Orion closed the gap between himself and Dumbledore in one stride. "Was that a threat?" he growled; his tone so menacing that Dumbledore involuntarily took a step backwards.

"No, merely an observation," Dumbledore replied, wondering if he'd bitten off more than he could chew when it came to the wizard in front of him.

Orion locked eyes with Dumbledore and then said softly, but no less menacingly, "If you even think about harming my children, my nephew, or their friends, then you will regret it. Do I need to remind you of the vow you made to me?"

Dumbledore scowled, he hadn't forgotten the vow at all, and the fact that he'd been forced into it ate at him every day. "No you don't," he said shortly. "I have no intention of harming anyone; my observation about the times we live in was merely that, an observation."

He shivered as Orion raked a piercing gaze over him, and strengthened his Occlumency shields until they were as strong as they could possibly be. The silence lasted for a short while before Orion broke it.

"Keep that vow, Dumbledore, and we won't have a problem. Break it, and you'll find that I can be an even worse enemy than Voldemort."

He turned and stalked off, his robes swirling around him agitatedly. Halfway down the corridor, he smoothly changed into Leo and padded down the stairs, his tail lashing around him in a clear indication of his anger.

Left in the alcove, the Marauders looked at each other in wide-eyed shock. As one, they packed up the prank equipment and headed for their dormitories, confused and more than a little scared at the confrontation that they'd witnessed. At the portrait of the Fat Lady, they separated, and Severus headed for the Slytherin common room in the dungeons, utilizing several secret passages that the Marauders had discovered on previous night-time wanders. Closing their eyes, they tried to put the whole episode out of their minds, finally falling into an uneasy sleep two hours later.

Several weeks after the midnight confrontation, it was the day of the first task. The students and guests all gathered in the stadium which had been erected for precisely this purpose. The champions gathered in a tent to the side, all nervous and all desperately trying not to show it.

"What do you think it is?" Aleksandar asked. Orion looked over at him and then replied, "I don't know. I do know, however, that I'm glad the waiting is almost over." His opponent looked at him briefly and then nodded, falling silent as the tournament organizer came in.

"Gather round, champions," the wizard said eagerly. "Now, the number you draw from this bag will be the order you face the task in. The task is this: You will enter the stadium one at a time. A course has been laid out within it, containing obstacles that you must overcome in order to retrieve two treasures. The treasures are located at the end of the obstacles, but once you've reached the treasures, the obstacles will change, and you must get back to the start of the course, with your treasures, going through the new obstacles on the return. The one with the fastest overall time wins. You may use anything you wish in order to get through the course, with the exceptions of Apparition, Portkeys, and flying. You must go through the obstacles; you are not allowed to fly above them. Do you understand what you need to do?"

When all the champions nodded silently, the official offered the bag

to each of the champions, all of whom were thinking how easy the task seemed. Orion snapped out of that line of thought a second after it began – he knew better than to underestimate any of the tasks that would be put before them. He took his number and looked at it, swearing mentally. Abraxas Malfoy was first. He was last.

Up in the stands, James and Sirius were sitting with their parents and looking around anxiously for Severus and Remus. "Where are they?" James said for the twentieth time.

"They must be your uncle's treasures," Charles replied, disgust and anger evident in his tone and body language. "The task calls for the contestants to make their way through an obstacle course to rescue two "treasures" and then get back to the start of the course, going through new obstacles on the return journey. The contestant with the best time wins."

"Well, Sev and Remy are Uncle Orion's treasures so it makes sense," James said after a few minutes.

Orion Black snorted beside him. "You're forgetting one thing, Mr Potter," he said coolly. "The tournament was designed for adults; the organizer should never have agreed to use children in any part of it, even this part. People have died in this tournament, a fact which I'm sure your uncle is well aware of."

James fell silent, and turned a worried gaze to the course. He couldn't see the section which held the treasures for each competitor, that part was enclosed by large hedges, but the rest of the course was in plain view. There was a cannon blast as the first champion entered the arena.

After the other five competitors had completed the task, it was Orion's turn. The Potters, Sirius and Lily all cheered as he entered the arena, but Orion didn't acknowledge them. He was focused on getting past the first obstacle which wasn't one obstacle but a crowd

of them. Kneazles, enlarged with an enlarging charm, attacked him viciously, taking exception to the smell of his inner animagus forms.

"Bloody hell why do I always have to be right," Orion growled as he dodged the furry menaces. Freezing them all in place he was just about to go on to the next obstacle when he heard a familiar voice.

"Orion James Potter, watch your language."

Orion spun round to see Emma glaring at him. Blushing bright red, he yelled back, "Sorry, Mum." Emma sat down, blushing faintly herself as other members of the crowd laughed.

Charles put an arm round her and murmured, "Did you hear what he called you?"

Emma nodded mutely, and whispered, "I hope he's OK."

Further into the course, Orion had dealt with several magical traps, killed a couple of Acromantula, correctly solved a riddle set by a Sphinx and had entered the enclosed area where the crowd couldn't see what was happening. Only one obstacle remained between him and the two treasures – a dragon.

"Oh joy," he muttered as the dragon shot a jet of fire at him. Thinking quickly, he grinned. "Accio Bludgers," he muttered.

"Where are those Bludgers going?" Madam Hooch yelled as the two iron balls streaked across the pitch and into the course. Her answer came as a dragon rose from the enclosed area, roaring and trying to defend itself against the bludgers which were attacking it without mercy. As the crowd watched in open-mouthed disbelief, the two bludgers struck the side of the dragon's head, cracking its skull.

"Dad!" Severus and Remus yelled as Orion ran towards them. He stopped abruptly when he registered the presence of two other

people in the area with them.

"Who are you?" he growled.

The unknown men smiled unpleasantly at him, and then the taller one said, "We'll give you back your treasures if you agree to follow our Lord. He needs new recruits you see, the Unspeakables keep killing them."

Orion sized up the situation. The part of his mind which sensed dark magic was ringing loud alarm bells, and he could sense the Dark Mark on the two wizards easily. What concerned him more were the knives they were holding to Severus and Remus' throats.

"What if I say no?" he enquired.

"Then we kill your precious treasures," the second Death Eater sneered.

Orion saw red. Casting an invisibility spell on himself, he ran to the side of the enclosure and cast a spell which he'd not cast since he was in school.

"Sectumsempra!" he hissed, cancelling the invisibility spell just after casting the curse.

Severus and Remus felt a rush of energy as a spell went past them, but as soon as they felt their captors let them go, they rushed to their father, who caught them in a tight hug. "Don't look back," he said firmly as he flicked his wand in the direction of the Death Eaters.

"What did you do?" Severus asked.

Orion looked down at him and then said grimly, "I killed them." Not giving them time to be shocked or upset, he said, "We need to go, now."

The boys allowed themselves to be steered out of the enclosure and through the course, wondering at the fact that they didn't feel scared of their father. He'd just admitted to killing two men, so why didn't they feel afraid? A loud noise assaulted their ears and they realized that they were out of the course and it was over.

Orion turned round from looking at his time – it was the second fastest, when he heard two soft thumps. Seeing Severus and Remus unconscious on the ground, he quickly knelt and checked their vital signs. Finding them alive, he conjured stretchers and floated them back to his room, knowing that they would want answers as to why he'd acted the way he had in the enclosure.

It took several hours for them to wake up, the unconsciousness having passed from a shock-induced faint to a natural sleep after the first half an hour. Orion had subtly reinforced the sleeping part with a mild spell, wanting time to sort things out in his mind before attempting to explain it. Charles and Emma had come to visit him during this time, along with James, wanting to know if Severus and Remus were alright. Once they were assured that the boys were fine, just sleeping, Charles had sent James away so that he and Emma could talk with Orion. James had protested only a little, seeing that his uncle looked tired and not really in the mood to talk at all. After once more being told that yes, he could see his cousins when they woke up, he left to find Sirius and discuss the first task.

"What happened?" Charles asked bluntly.

Orion looked at him and then looked at the bedroom where both his children were asleep on his bed. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Putting up a silencing charm, Charles growled, "Don't play games with me, Harry James Potter, you've got that look in your eyes, the one which says that something happened which hurt you, and you're

not going to talk about it unless we force you. I don't want to play that game today, and you're going to have to explain it to Severus and Remus anyway, so you can explain it to us first."

Orion stared at his grandfather with an indecipherable look in his eyes. Finally he looked up at the ceiling and said, "Dad. Any advice here?"

He seemed to listen to something and then shook his head, turning his gaze back to Charles. "Dad says that when you're like this you won't give up so it's best to just tell you. He said that you'll keep at me until I do, that you'll just get angry if I keep trying to evade your questions, and that you being angry is not something I want to see."

Charles looked worried. "Um, Harry, we just sent your father away to find your godfather, you do know that, don't you? And if by seeing me angry you're referring to the incident two years ago when you landed yourself in St. Mungo's, I wasn't angry, I was relived and irritated."

Orion looked at him in stunned silence before shaking his head. "I'm not going mad, I promise you," he said. "That incident with Voldemort made me aware of some things which I hadn't known before, that being that when my parents died, they attached themselves to me, and mentally constructed a replica of our home in Godric's Hollow within my mind. They've been with me since they died. When Sirius and Remus died, they too somehow managed to connect with me in the same way, and Severus' older self did the same, although he wasn't dead when I came back to here. So, I've been living with the spirits of my parents, Remus, Severus, and Sirius in my head for a while, only I wasn't aware of them until two years ago. I can converse with them mentally, usually in dreams, but I can also do it when I'm awake. I don't normally talk to the ceiling like I did just now, but my situation gives a whole new meaning to the phrase, 'the ones we love never truly leave us,' "

"So, what did he say?" Emma asked.

Orion looked irritated. "I told you what he said. I think it's good advice too, I just don't know if I can follow it."

Charles caught his grandson's gaze with his own firm one, and said, "Tell us."

Orion struggled with the command for a few moments, but gave in. "It was Lily all over again," he whispered, his eyes glazing over as he remembered the task. Charles and Emma waited patiently while he fought to regain control of his emotions. Once he'd recovered, he said, "I got through the course, there were Death Eaters holding Sev and Remy hostage. The Death Eaters had knives at their throats, just like Ron did with Lily. They said that I could have them back if I joined Voldemort."

"What did you do?" Charles asked, keeping his tone calm and soothing.

Orion took a deep breath, centered himself, and continued. "I cast an invisibility spell on myself, and then I ran to the side of the enclosure. I killed the Death Eaters and finished the task."

"What did you mean when you said it was Lily all over again?" Emma questioned.

Orion choked on a sob as he whispered, "Ron offered me Lily in exchange for marrying his sister. When I agreed, he still killed her. The Death Eaters offered me Sev and Remy in exchange for joining Voldemort. They would have killed them even if I had agreed. I couldn't lose Sev and Remy the same way I lost Lily, I just couldn't."

With that, he broke completely, the stress of the task, the shock of the Death Eaters' unwelcome intrusion, and the similarity to the past situation all taking their toll. Charles immediately enfolded him in a hug, grunting slightly as Orion clung to him like a drowning man

would cling to a piece of driftwood.

In Godric's Hollow, the residents were shocked as Orion's emotions surged around them like a tidal wave. There were several identifiable emotions in the onslaught, renewed grief with respect to his future children, and guilt over killing the Death Eaters in front of Severus and Remus. There was also a sense of guilt stemming from a sense that he'd somehow failed to protect them. The spirits all remained quiet, wanting to see how Charles handled the situation.

"Listen to me, Harry," Charles said quietly once Orion had recovered enough to sit back and listen properly. "You are not responsible for the Death Eaters being there. You did what you had to do in order to protect your children; no one would fault you for that, least of all me. You are not at fault in this, and as for your past situation, you weren't at fault there either. Ron was once your friend, it was natural for you to try to get your daughter back by appealing to him as your friend. It didn't work, but you should not feel guilty about that. You did everything you could."

Orion nodded, breathing deeply to get himself back under full control. Once he felt more like himself, he cast a freshening spell on his face and clothes to remove all evidence of the emotional breakdown. He did feel lighter, as though a heavy burden which he hadn't even been aware of at the time, had been removed.

A movement in the bedroom alerted him to the fact that at least one of his sons was awake. More movement suggested that both of them were, a suggestion which proved to be true as both boys appeared in the doorway, looking uncertainly into the living room. Orion held out his arms and was promptly treated like a climbing frame as Severus and Remus both tried to climb on top of him like they'd done when they were younger and needed reassurance. Discreetly widening the chair with a spell so that all of them could sit on it, he said, "How much did you hear?"

"Why do you think we heard anything? You had a silencing charm up," Remus replied, wincing as Severus elbowed him in the ribs.

"You prat! You just admitted that we tried to listen in," Severus said.

Orion chuckled. "I guess I need to explain then." Two nods was his answer and he sighed. "Very well," he said. Seeing that he had their full attention, he said, "The situation you were in today, with the Death Eaters, reminded me very much of how my daughter died. My ex-friend held a knife to her throat, the same way the Death Eaters held knives to yours, and said that he wouldn't kill her if I agreed to marry his sister. You heard what the Death Eaters asked in exchange for letting you live. My ex-friend didn't honor the deal, after I'd agreed to marry his sister, he killed my daughter anyway."

Closing his eyes, Orion said, "I knew that the Death Eaters would kill you, no matter what I agreed to do. So, I killed them. I did what I had to do because I absolutely refuse to lose you the way I lost my other children. I don't want to scare you, or make you feel uneasy around me, but I won't apologise for doing what I must in order to keep you safe."

There was silence for a long moment and then Orion found himself almost gasping for air. "We're not afraid of you, Dad," Severus said firmly.

"Yeah," Remus added, "now we'll be safer than ever."

"What do you mean?" Orion asked.

"Well," Remus said, after a quick non-verbal talk with Severus where they only seemed to use their eyes to convey messages, "if anyone harasses us here, we can just tell them that they'd better stop or our Dad will kill them, literally."

Orion gaped at them for a second or two before he began to laugh.

"Trust you two to cheer me up," he murmured. "I don't kill anyone seventeen or younger, so that threat's not going to hold water. Any adult who harms you, however, is fair game."

"Deal," the two boys said, and slid off the chair, landing in an ungraceful heap on the floor. As their father peered down at them, looking both amused and concerned that they might have hurt themselves, they picked themselves up and patted his arms.

"We like the fact that you want to protect us that much," Severus said. "It was a bit scary, but we know you wouldn't hurt us, so we're not afraid of you."

"Hmm. Just wait till the next time you're in trouble," Orion teased, reaching out to ruffle Severus' hair. His son ducked away from him and then came back to the chair, hugging him again.

"We won't be afraid even then," he whispered in Orion's ear.

"Why not?" Orion asked.

"Because we know that no matter how angry you might get, all you're going to do is maybe yell a bit, or ground us, and that's all you'd do. You'd never physically hurt us, and we know that. That's why we're never going to be afraid of you," Remus said in his other ear.

Orion was so shocked at his sons' unconscious paraphrasing of something which he'd said to Severus' older self in his seventh year that he could only hug them tightly while he processed the words. He let go when two pairs of hands began to tickle him, and mock-growled before sending a couple of tickling spells back.

"Hmph. Go away," he said, but the grin on his face belied his words and the boys grinned back before racing out the door. Orion shook his head, suddenly feeling very exhausted. Checking the time, he called for a house-elf, ordering himself a light snack. When it arrived,

he ate it, and then settled into bed, instructing the portrait guarding his door to not disturb him for anything short of an emergency. Despite it being only mid-afternoon, he was asleep within minutes, and wouldn't wake until the next morning, when he would discover that his sons needed his protection once more.

Chapter Twenty-Nine: A Lethal Lesson

Orion groaned as he awoke the next morning. Looking at the time, he swore, having slept right through until mid-morning. Mentally running through what he knew of his sons' timetables, he realized that Remus and Severus would be in their Defence Against the Dark Arts class right now, as the Gryffindors and Slytherins shared that particular class, along with Potions. Rolling his eyes at his poor sleeping habits of late, Orion rose and dressed efficiently, choosing to wear his work robes rather than his everyday robes. The work robes, of course, had his Unspeakable ranking on them, but he kept the badge in invisible mode, which meant that to anyone who didn't know what he was, his robes would appear to be plain, everyday, black robes. This suited him perfectly.

As he left his rooms, his expression altered into a scowl as he thought about the events of the previous day and he changed course, striding purposefully in the direction of the library. Unless he was mistaken, if the tournament organisers wanted to include minors in the tasks, they had to ask for, and receive, permission from the parents or guardians. Orion might be a Triwizard Champion, but that didn't excuse the organisers from fulfilling their duty as regards obtaining permission from him to use his sons as part of the task. The fact that they hadn't even bothered to enquire with him first rankled, and he grew more and more annoyed as he thought about it.

When he entered the library, he headed for the history section, where he knew books on the Triwizard Tournament would be kept. Finding one that looked like it might suit his purpose; he took it off the shelf and chose a seat at a table near to the issuing desk. He saw Madam Pince looking suspiciously at him and sighed.

"I'm not going to harm the book," he promised. "I need to do some research, that's all."

The librarian sniffed but turned back to her previous task, leaving

Orion to breathe a silent sigh of relief and settle down to studying. Half an hour later, he had the information he wanted. Putting the book back and thanking Madam Pince for allowing him to use it, he stalked out of the library and along the corridors, his scowl clearing his path for him like magic.

Imitating me much, Harry? a voice drawled in his mind.

Orion kept his scowl firmly fixed in place and replied, Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, sir, and besides, I'm too angry about what I've discovered to do anything but scowl.

Humph. Work on the robes a little; they're not billowing in quite the correct way.

Orion snorted at the reply and stopped outside the stone gargoyle. As much as he hated it, Dumbledore was the chief warlock of the Wizengamot, and he needed his advice. Steeling himself, and reminding his protesting spirit family that Dumbledore could be useful every now and again, he ascended the stairs. As he went up to Dumbledore's office, he reflected that being Heir, and therefore Lord, of both the Gryffindor and Slytherin lines was useful, the gargoyle had taken one look at his rings and literally jumped out of the way.

"Ah, Mr Potter. I must admit I'm surprised to see you here voluntarily. What seems to be the problem," Dumbledore said, his eyes twinkling more than Orion had ever seen them.

Gritting his teeth, Orion said, "I need your help to sue the organizers of the Triwizard Tournament. My two treasures in the task yesterday were my children, and I did not give permission beforehand for them to be involved. If I had been asked, I would have refused to give permission because while I am alright with my children watching the tasks, I am most certainly not alright with them being involved with it."

Dumbledore sat back and considered the issue. "Hmm. This is a

tricky problem. As a champion, they might have felt they couldn't approach you without letting you know what the task was," he offered.

Orion growled and then responded, "They could have asked in general terms, along the lines of "would you allow us to use your children in one of the tasks. All safety precautions would be taken to keep them safe." They could have asked like that."

"True," Dumbledore allowed. "What were you intending to do about it though? The task was quite safe."

"Quite safe?" Orion repeated incredulously. "When I got to the enclosure where they were, my sons were being held hostage by Death Eaters. The Death Eaters told me that I would have them back if I joined Voldemort. If I refused, I'd have to watch them die. I killed the Death Eaters and got Severus and Remus out of there as fast as possible, but the situation most certainly was not safe!"

Dumbledore had sat up more alertly at the mention of Death Eaters and now he frowned. "Would you permit me to examine your memory of the event?" he enquired.

Orion looked suspiciously at him and Dumbledore hastened to add, "You would be able to retrieve your memory at the end of the viewing, I do not wish to keep it."

Relaxing a little bit, Orion nodded, withdrew the memory from his mind, and deposited it in the Pensieve in front of him. Once Dumbledore had finished viewing it, Orion put it back in his mind, and spent a few seconds locking it away in its proper place while Dumbledore thought of how to handle what he'd seen.

Finally, he turned to Orion and said, "I will make the organisers aware that you have brought a complaint against them which they need to address, you are correct in saying that they should have contacted

you first about involving your children. Would you like me to involve Charles? As the head of your family, he should be notified as well.

Orion thought about it, and then nodded. He might need Charles' help as well as Dumbledore's. Dumbledore nodded back, and then said, "Is there anything else?"

Orion hesitated, and then said, "Thanks for agreeing to help."

Dumbledore smiled at him. "It's no problem. We can't have Triwizard champions losing their children in a task when they haven't agreed to their children being involved."

Orion gave Dumbledore a tight smile and said, "Exactly." He stood and left the office, descending the staircase and sighing when the gargoyle saluted him. Patting the stone head, he said, "Easy, none of that now, I want to keep a low profile. I just needed to get in quickly, OK."

The gargoyle gave him a disgruntled look and turned its back on him. Orion chuckled softly before staggering backwards as a wave of dark magic hit him, carrying the unmistakable flavor of the Unforgivables. Abandoning any sense of dignity, he ran for the Defence against the Dark Arts classroom, instinctively knowing that that was where the magic had come from.

Halfway there, he collided with a boy who was racing towards him. He tumbled backwards, and the boy landed on top of him. Both winded, they lay there for a second before Orion pushed the student off and rose to his feet, extending a hand to help the boy up.

"Excuse me, sir," the boy panted. His eyes widened as he realized who he'd knocked over and then he grabbed hold of Orion's arm. "Mr Potter, sir, you have to get to the Defence classroom. Professor Garber, he,"

"Calm down, tell me what happened. Are Severus and Remus OK? What's your name?" Orion asked, pulling the boy up and heading towards the DADA classroom while trying to stop him from passing out due to lack of oxygen.

"Sorry sir, I'm Frank Longbottom," the boy replied. He didn't notice Orion's sharp hiss upon hearing his name. Continuing in a hurry, he said, "Sir, Professor Garber, he was showing us the Unforgivable Curses. He demonstrated the curses on my classmates." Orion didn't hear anything else as he began to run towards the classroom, his mind conjuring up all sorts of horrible images.

Frank ran after him until Orion stopped, turned round and snapped, "Go to Professor McGonagall, tell her what you told me and tell her to come to the DADA classroom immediately."

Frank nodded and ran off while Orion slid to a stop in front of the closed door of the classroom he sought. He couldn't hear a thing from inside and encountered a silencing charm when he scanned the door. Growling, he did the only thing he could. Blowing the door off its hinges, he took two strides into the room, snarling, "What the hell is going on here!"

The room was completely silent, all eyes trained on him as he entered the room fully, his eyes sweeping round, taking in the details the way he'd been trained to do. The scene that he was met with would haunt his dreams for weeks to come.

All but six of the students were lying on the floor around the classroom, nursing injuries of varying severity. Orion forced himself not to be sick as he noticed several students were unconscious, and from the position of their heads, at least two were already dead. The missing six students were at the front of the room, and Orion growled as he realized that they were the Marauders, Lily, and Peter Pettigrew. Remus was looking very pale and looked to be close to losing consciousness. He was bleeding heavily from several deep

wounds in his abdomen and Orion quickened his pace, knowing that his son needed urgent medical attention. The pressure being applied to the wounds by an ashen-faced James was helping to stem the flow but the wounds weren't closing on their own like they normally would. Sirius and Severus were curled up on the floor, whimpers escaping from between their tightly clenched teeth. Lily and Peter, who were trying to help James with Remus' wounds, were looking very scared but seemed to be otherwise unharmed.

Shaking off his shock, Garber aimed his wand at Orion and forcefully said, "Avada Kedavra!"

The deadly green curse sped towards Orion, who nimbly sidestepped it, knowing that no one behind him would be hit as the curse was aimed at his head. Aiming his wand, he fired off a non-verbal stunning spell, which Garber dodged just in time. The professor smirked and said coldly, "Try to interfere and it will be these little brats that pay the price." Without bothering to see if Orion would heed his advice, Garber quickly aimed his wand at Severus and said, "Crucio!"

As Severus screamed in pain, something in Orion snapped. He snarled and began throwing all the curses he could think of at the insane professor. He kept the curses to Light or mildly Dark ones though, not wanting to traumatize the class any more than they already had been. He mixed the curses and hexes with some transfiguration spells, thanking the older version of Severus for his insistence that he practice dueling with Professor McGonagall in his seventh year. It was a useful and fairly unusual style, but one which was very useful in this setting. At the front of his mind were three main feelings, concern for the entire class, fear that he might lose his family once again, and an overpowering need to ensure that Garber was taken out quickly before he could do any more damage.

For his part, Garber was realizing very quickly that he'd bitten off more than he could chew. Orion was powerful, more powerful than

he himself was, and Garber had made the mistake of targeting Orion's children. He threw several curses towards the interfering Triwizard champion, but was shocked when Orion threw up a shield which seemed to absorb the curses. Swearing mentally, the professor tried to retreat towards his office while still casting a multitude of spells towards his opponent. Spotting Sirius, Severus, James, and Lily trying to carry Remus to the back of the room while Orion provided cover for them, Garber threw several high-level Dark hexes and curses at Orion, who had to spend a couple of seconds dealing with them.

Those two seconds were all Garber needed as he fired another Killing Curse directly at James, who was the closest to him as he was carrying Remus' feet.

As Orion transfigured a nearby desk into a stone wall, he knew he'd be too late to prevent the curse from hitting his nephew/father. It was with profound shock that he watched Peter crash into James, knocking him out of the path of the deadly curse. There was no time to evade it himself though, and as the curse hit him, Peter looked straight at Orion. The look that was in his eyes a split second before life faded from them told Orion that he'd willingly given his life for his friend, and Orion was briefly transported back to the night in the Shrieking Shack.

"You should have died! Died for them, like we'd have done for you!" Sirius had snarled to Wormtail that night. Orion briefly bowed his head in acknowledgement of Peter's sacrifice, and turned back to Garber.

The professor seemed as shocked as anyone that the curse hadn't hit its intended target, and Orion used his moment of inattention to fire six powerful stunners, all of which hit their target. Garber was thrown against the wall and slid down it. Looking at him, Orion was fairly confident that he wouldn't get up again anytime soon and with the immediate threat subdued, he hurried over to Remus.

"Dad, he's dying!" Severus choked out, too upset to care that he was crying in front of all his classmates. Orion put a hand on his shoulder.

"Not while I'm around he's not," he muttered, before casting the strongest life-suspension spell he knew. Feeling the sensation of his own life-force joining with Remus' and supporting it, he relaxed. Just to be sure, he checked Remus' vital signs and found that while Remus' pulse and breathing were slower and weaker than they should be, they were at least steady and he wouldn't expire before he reached the hospital wing. The wounds had also begun to close, although they were doing so at an agonizingly slow pace when compared to Remus' normal rapid healing rate.

Taking half a minute to catch his breath, he realized that Professor McGonagall and Madam Pomfrey were standing in the doorway and looking at the carnage in horror. "Mr Potter," Professor McGonagall finally said faintly, "what happened?"

"I don't really know," Orion replied. "I came in here and it was like stepping into a war zone. I took Garber out but not before he tortured several students and killed several more. I was just about to begin sorting out the injured students when you arrived."

Professor McGonagall nodded, some of her normal, brisk manner reappearing now that she had a problem to solve. Madam Pomfrey pushed past her and surveyed the room, her eyes lingering on the dead students. Peter Pettigrew, a victim of the Killing Curse, and four others, two Slytherins who had died of broken necks, and two Gryffindors who had died quickly from injuries sustained before Orion had entered the room. Noticing that the Gryffindors were on the Slytherin side of the room, Orion raised an eyebrow in question.

"They were trying to protect us. House rivalries went out the window when we realized our professor was trying to kill us," Lucius Malfoy answered. His voice was shaky and extremely unsteady as he spoke,

and his disheveled appearance and haunted expression spoke of someone who'd just had their world turned completely upside down.

"I imagine they would," Orion murmured, a sudden thought striking him. Going up the stairs to where Garber lay, he cut away the man's left sleeve and turned his arm so the forearm was exposed.

His expression a mixture of disgust and resignation, Orion descended the stairs, levitating Garber with him. He dropped the man on the floor next to him and said, "Just so you know, your professor," he sneered the word, "was a Death Eater. If any of you have any notion that being a Death Eater is a glamorous career choice, well, you only have to look at him to see the error in that line of thought. Death Eaters torture and kill people for fun, they enjoy it. Do you really want to be in Garber's position a few years from now, torturing and killing children just to feel powerful?"

Heads were shaken slowly and Orion nodded. "I don't want to try and tell you what to think, what I am urging all of you to do, however, is start to think for yourselves. Voldemort is nothing but an evil psychopath with delusions of grandeur and serious father issues. He represents nothing but a lifetime of painful, never-ending servitude, with constant torture being part and parcel of the deal."

He abruptly turned to see how the Marauders and Lily were doing, leaving the shocked students to think about what he'd said. Remus was still pale and unconscious but Orion could tell that he was alive; the spell which connected them would have told him if his son began to die. Switching his gaze to Severus, Orion saw that he was still feeling the aftereffects of the Cruciatus curse.

Without pausing to think, Orion walked up behind him and hugged him, the touch gentle but firm, letting Severus know that he was there but keeping the contact gentle enough so that Severus could pull away if he wanted to. It seemed that he didn't, as Orion found himself with an armful of sobbing teenager. He felt James put his arms round

his middle and gently shifted Severus so that James could come into the hug as well. A few minutes later, once they'd recovered from the initial shock, they disentangled themselves from him and stood by their friends. James glanced at the sheet which was covering Peter, and the look on his face was one that Orion knew very well. The mix of guilt and grief that James was feeling now would be difficult to work through, and Orion resolved to contact Charles as soon as possible, once all the students had been seen to.

Looking around, he noticed that Professor McGonagall had managed to organize the students into some semblance of order. Those too severely injured to walk were being helped onto stretchers to be transported to the hospital wing. Remus was on one, as were five other students. There were about twenty students in the class, so with six severely injured, and five dead, that left nine either nursing less severe injuries or who were physically fine but emotionally and psychologically traumatised. The dead students were also on stretchers, but they were completely covered up.

Catching Professor McGonagall's eye, Orion said quietly, "If my children need to see me tonight, do I have permission to keep them with me?"

McGonagall thought quickly and then said, "Ask them now, if they want to stay with you tonight then it's best to have them with you from the beginning of curfew, rather than risking them wandering the halls after they're supposed to be in bed. Although, given that they are the infamous Marauders, I suppose I shouldn't be surprised at their late-night wanders."

She arched an eyebrow and Orion shrugged. "I've told them that I don't mind if they play a few pranks here and there as long as their grades stay up and as long as they don't start using pranks as an excuse to bully other students. If they get caught, well, the professor who catches them will deal with it. I don't think they'll be in the mood for pranks for a while though. Not after today."

McGonagall looked round the room. Her eyes fell on the covered stretchers and her stern demeanour cracked as her eyes began to shine brightly. Orion hesitantly drew her into a light hug, unable to not offer comfort to the woman he had thought of as a surrogate mother in his later Hogwarts years, even though the Professor McGonagall he was hugging now didn't know of their future relationship. Again, the hug was brief but when it ended, McGonagall gave him a brief, if slightly tremulous smile.

"Thank you," she said quietly.

Orion patted her shoulder. "No need to thank me. Should I call my work mates? They could provide extra security for the rest of the year."

McGonagall shook her head. "No, thank you. This was an internal matter, nothing to do with the Triwizard competition. I need to inform the parents,"

Orion cut her off. "I'll inform James' and Sirius' parents as to what happened today. I'm sure they'll want to come and see that their children are alright."

Again, he was the recipient of a brief smile and an even briefer hug. "Thank you. That would be a great help," McGonagall said before she and Madam Pomfrey began to organize the students into a rough line for the walk up to the hospital wing. The entire class was going because the lightly injured students would need calming potions and because all of them needed to be kept away from the rest of the students until an announcement of what had happened could be made to the rest of the student body.

Orion walked up to the hospital wing with the class, walking between Severus' and Remus' stretchers. Each of his arms was grasped tightly as his children wanted some tangible proof that he hadn't

disappeared. Sirius was on a stretcher just behind them, and Orion was carrying James up to the hospital wing as he had adamantly refused a stretcher, preferring to be carried instead. The silent tears which were currently soaking the shoulder of Orion's robe were probably the reason for his insistence that his uncle carry him. If he was being carried, it was completely natural for him to cling to the one carrying him, and it was a perfect cover for his emotional breakdown.

When the mostly silent procession arrived at the hospital wing, Orion gently put James down on a bed next to Severus, Sirius, and Remus. All the students were going to be checked over by Madam Pomfrey before they were allowed to leave, although the most seriously injured students would receive attention first. The dead students were put in a private room so they weren't being constantly stared at by the students who were still alive.

Quietly, Orion got to work with the less seriously injured students, healing cuts and broken bones, documenting everything as he went. He'd received healing training as part of his job, and although he wasn't the designated healer of his team he knew enough to deal with the injuries he was currently treating.

Along with treating the injuries, he gently questioned the students about what had happened, trying to gain a picture of how the class had descended into the chaos he'd walked into. As it wasn't an official interview, he didn't need parental consent, all he was after was answers to specific questions.

As he questioned and healed the students, a disturbing picture began to form. Garber had apparently been harboring a serious resentment of Remus since the start of the year and had chosen this lesson to let it out. The professor had begun normally enough with a lecture about the Unforgivables, and had then cast the Imperius curse on James, commanding him to stab Remus with a silver dagger. He'd then released the curse and watched as James

realized what he'd done. The sadistic professor had then cast the Cruciatus on Sirius and Severus when they attempted to curse him in retaliation. Lily and Peter, followed by the rest of the class, had stood up to protest what he'd done, and Garber had thrown a mild explosion curse at the centre of the room. The curse had done its job, throwing most of the class to the back of the room and causing several desks to explode into sharp, long splinters. With the rest of the class at the back of the room, either injured or dead, Garber had been free to focus on his initial targets. That had been when Orion had entered the room.

Finished with the less serious injuries, Orion sat between Severus and Remus' beds. They would be kept in the hospital wing until they were fully recovered. Remus' wounds would take a day or so to completely heal and he would be tired and ill from the silver exposure for a few days after that. Severus was recovering from being hit with the Cruciatus, as was Sirius, and both boys would be spending at least the next couple of days in bed. Lily and James didn't have any physical injuries but they were both severely shaken by the whole experience and James was also dealing with the guilt of having stabbed Remus while under the influence of the Imperius curse.

Shaking his head, Orion went to contact Charles and Emma. After quickly explaining the situation and reassuring them that James was alive but could benefit from a little parental comfort right then, he stood aside to let them through the Floo connection. Once they'd come through, he contacted Orion Black and once more explained the situation. Almost before he'd finished speaking, the Black patriarch was coming through the Floo, intent on immediately seeing his son. Orion stood aside to let him through before closing the connection and entering the hospital wing once again. As he looked around the large room, letting his eyes linger on the beds which held Severus, Remus, and Sirius, he sighed.

Sitting down beside his children, he hugged both of them, noticing that Sirius and James were being hugged by their parents. James

was quietly crying into his father's shoulder like he'd done with Orion, while Emma was stroking his hair. Sirius was clutching at his father as though he'd never let him go, and his father was holding him equally tightly. Orion let his eyes catch those of the other parents and he saw an emotion in their eyes which he knew was reflected in his own.

Garber was going to die a very slow and painful death if they had anything to say about it.

Chapter Thirty: Aftermath

Dumbledore's office had had to be expanded as all the parents of the students who were in the ill-fated Defence Against the Dark Arts class had turned up at Hogwarts demanding answers. Orion, Charles, and Emma Potter, accompanied by Orion Black and Abraxas Malfoy were at the front of the group, while the five sets of parents who had lost their children were immediately behind them. The noise was such that several silencing charms had to be put up to contain it as all the parents were busy demanding answers from Dumbledore as well as demanding that Garber's head be mounted on a pike in front of the Ministry.

"QUIET!" Dumbledore finally bellowed. Shocked into silence, the mingled group of witches, wizards, and Muggles vented their feelings by glaring at the Headmaster with all the venom they could muster.

"I brought you all here so that you could be told what happened yesterday, instead of hearing rumours and gossip about the events. Mr Potter here," he indicated Orion, who tensed as all the attention was turned on him, "entered the classroom and was responsible for knocking the professor unconscious, thereby saving a lot more lives. For those of you who lost your children, I and the rest of the staff, offer our sincere condolences. None of us saw this coming."

"How is it that you could employ a Death Eater and not know it?" Mr Pettigrew yelled, holding his wife, who hadn't stopped crying since she'd entered the room.

Dumbledore looked chagrined. "I don't routinely inspect my staff for the Dark Mark. Professor Garber was not a Death Eater when I hired him, which was several years ago, he must have only recently taken the Mark."

"Then maybe it's a good idea to start checking the staff," Orion Black muttered, and a chorus of growled agreement followed in the wake of

his comment. Dumbledore gave him a sharp look but faltered when he received an equally sharp one back.

"What happened?" Daniel Evans asked. Although Lily had not been injured badly, the emotional and psychological trauma she and the other students had suffered was bad enough that Madam Pomfrey had given out doses of Dreamless Sleep to all the students involved, giving each student enough for a week.

Orion closed his eyes briefly to give himself time to calm himself down. It would not look good if he broke down now. In a flat tone, he recited the events from the time he met Frank Longbottom in the hallway, to the time that Professor McGonagall and Madam Pomfrey entered the classroom. He looked straight at the Pettigrews as he told them the circumstances of their son's death, and frowned when Peter's father growled, "So it's your nephew's fault that my son's dead then!"

"No it isn't," Orion said, forcing down the urge to bite the man's head off. He was mourning the loss of his son; Orion knew that feeling intimately and knew that Peter's father needed to blame someone for his son's death. The problem was that he was trying to blame the wrong person.

Seeing that Mr Pettigrew was about to argue with him, Orion cut him off. "Peter saw that James was about to be hit with the Killing Curse and pushed him out of the way. He did it to save his friend, and it wasn't James' fault that there wasn't time for Peter to get out of the way too. It was a very brave and selfless thing to do; there aren't many people I know who would do the same. Do not blame my nephew for your son's choices; James is already blaming himself enough without you adding to it. If you need someone to blame, then blame the one who cast the Killing Curse. It is Garber's fault your son is dead, not James'."

"If he hadn't knocked your nephew out of the way, what would have

happened?" This was from the mother of one of the dead Slytherin students.

Orion looked pained. "I would be blaming myself for being too slow to save him. I was transfiguring a desk into a wall to block the curse but I was too slow. If James hadn't been knocked out of the way, he would have died, and I wouldn't have been able to stop it."

"I understand that all the Unforgivable Curses were used, not just the Killing Curse. Who were the other victims?"

"James was forced to stab one of my sons, Remus, several times with a dagger while under the influence of the Imperius curse, and my other son, Severus, was hit with the Cruciatus when he tried to stop Garber from carrying on what he was doing," Orion said coldly.

There was a lot of quiet murmuring after that, and several of the parents looked at Orion in a new light, not having known until then that he was in the same boat as they were with regard to their children being hurt. Turning to Dumbledore, Orion voiced the question that was on everyone's mind.

"What will happen to Garber?"

Dumbledore frowned. "He has been questioned by Aurors and is in a Ministry holding cell awaiting trial. I can tell you that he will be given the Dementor's Kiss at the very least, and probably a long time in Azkaban before that."

"Not good enough," Abraxas Malfoy growled. "Bring him here, let us all have a go at him."

"I'm afraid that's not possible," Dumbledore said, his eyes hardening slightly. "I could not, in good conscience, allow him to be attacked by a mob. No matter what he's done, he deserves a fair trial."

"A FAIR TRIAL!" The exclamation from all the parents in the room was loud enough to cause serious damage to Dumbledore's hearing and several of the parents lunged for the old wizard. In the lead were all the parents who had lost children. Orion had to choke back laughter as he saw that Dumbledore was being slowly strangled by several of the bereaved fathers, while the mothers were casting any spell they could think of at him.

Sighing, Orion, Charles, and Orion Black hit the enraged parents with stunning spells, levitated them away from Dumbledore and then woke them up again. Orion was unlucky enough to be the closest to them and consequently got a fist in the nose from Mr Pettigrew.

"Ouch," he muttered, quickly healing his nose and wiping away the blood.

"Why did you do that?" Mr Pettigrew spat.

"He's not the one you want to kill," Orion replied evenly. Looking around he noticed that he had somehow been elected spokesperson and chief calmer-of-angry-mobs. Sighing, he added, "If we want Garber to face justice then killing the head of the Wizengamot is not the best move to make."

The ten bereaved parents stared at him and then at Dumbledore. "Fine," one of the other fathers said reluctantly. "But why can't we have a minute or two alone with him. Just to ask why he killed our children."

Orion turned to face Dumbledore and raised an eyebrow. The headmaster was coughing and wheezing as he recovered from his near strangulation and he glared at all of them. The glare was spoiled by the fact that he was dealing with the effects of the spells he'd been hit with.

"I won't press charges for what happened just now," he finally

managed to say, "and I will arrange for you to have your time with him, as long as you promise not to kill him."

After a few more minutes of grumbling and muttering, the agreement was reached, and Dumbledore put a Floo call through to the Ministry to bring Garber back. Twenty minutes later, the former professor shuffled into the room, flanked by two Aurors, one of whom was Moody.

"Why did you do it?" Mrs Pettigrew asked, speaking for the first time, her question coming not just from her but from the group as a whole.

Garber sneered at her. "The brats deserved it; they weren't prepared to fight back. The ones that did," he looked sideways at Orion and sneered, "well, their screams were like music to my ears. Little beasts need more discipline if you ask me."

The explosion in the room after he finished speaking defied description. Garber had to be hustled out of the room as the parents surged forward, intent on causing him grievous bodily harm if not outright killing him. At the head of the group was a snarling lion, Orion having changed into Leo as a method of dealing with the choking wave of anger which was threatening to overwhelm him.

Garber shook off the Aurors who were as unnerved as he was, and ran for it. Down the corridor he ran, passing students along the way who quickly pressed themselves to the wall as they saw that their former Defence professor was being chased by a huge lion.

Leo snarled as he chased his prey down the corridor, closing in with each bound. Garber stumbled as he ran down the stairs, losing his footing and tumbling to the next landing. Leo had no such problems – the big cat took the stairs in two graceful leaps and landed to one side of the fleeing murderer, putting one large paw on the wizard to hold him still.

Looking up to the next floor, he saw Dumbledore, the Aurors, the rest of the parents and a lot of students watching him. Rumbling a warning, he held up a paw to convey that he wanted them to stay where they were. Seeing that he was being obeyed, the lion grasped the collar of Garber's robes in his jaws and began to drag him up the stairs. At every step, Leo deliberately shook his head. He heard snickering from the students as they saw Garber's head being slammed into each step with every shake of Leo's head.

When Leo reached the top of the stairs, Garber was dizzy and in no condition to run. Dazed and concussed, he offered no resistance as the Aurors pulled him to his feet. Orion transformed back into himself and stood very close to Garber. In a tone which held more than a little of Leo's growl, and at a low enough volume that only Garber would hear him, he whispered, "If I had my way, I'd take you down to the Chamber of Secrets where all the parents of the children you've hurt and killed would be allowed to torture you to their heart's content. I'd go last, and by the time I'd finished, you'd be begging me to kill you. I would then send you back to your Master, alive, but in tiny pieces, tied to life with a Dark Arts spell which allows your soul to linger in this world even if your body is dismembered."

Garber whimpered in fear as he looked up into eyes which were the colour of death. Orion hissed at him and Garber promptly lost control of his bladder. He was more frightened of Orion at the moment than he was of Voldemort.

Orion snorted in disgust as he saw a wet patch grow on the captive's robes. Seeing that a large crowd had gathered, he said, "Show's over, will everyone please leave."

The crowd dispersed quickly. The Aurors took Garber away, not sure why he'd suddenly been so frightened of Orion but not bothering to investigate the cause too closely. The students left, discussing the chase and capture of Garber excitedly, while the parents left to search out their children. Now that Garber had been dealt with and

they'd had a chance to vent their feelings, they were united in one desire: reassure their children that things would be alright.

Charles, Emma, and Orion Potter, Daniel and Rose Evans, and Orion and Walburga Black made their way to the hospital wing, where their children were staying. James and Lily hadn't received any physical injuries but they'd refused to leave their friends, who were still recovering. Orion had reluctantly taken the life-suspension spell off Remus that morning when Poppy had assured him that Remus' vital signs were strong enough for the spell to not be necessary any more. While he'd done that, he'd enquired about Severus and Sirius, and had been told that while they were still weak and shaky from the Cruciatus curse, they too would make a full recovery.

When they got to the hospital wing, James looked up at Orion with red-rimmed eyes and threw himself into his uncle's arms. Not really surprised, as he'd been expecting something like this, Orion sat down on the nearest unoccupied bed and held him while James choked out a seemingly endless stream of apologies in between copious amounts of tears.

"Why are you apologizing?" Orion asked softly when James finally ran out of both tears and apologies.

James sniffed and looked up at him. "Because I'm the reason Remus almost died, and I'm also the reason that Peter did die." He dissolved into tears once more as he thought of his friend, who had shoved him out of the path of the deadly curse.

"James," Orion said softly. When this elicited no response, he said more firmly, "James, look at me."

James looked up at him again and Orion shifted both of them so that he was sitting on the bed with his back against the pillows and James was curled up in his lap. "James, Peter's death was not your fault. I

know it seems like it is, but it's not. He chose to push you out of the way of the Killing Curse. It was his choice, not yours. You didn't ask him to push you out of the way, he just did it. Garber killed him, not you. Do you understand?"

James sniffled. "I guess so. But, everyone will blame me. His parents will, and, why don't you blame me for almost killing Remus?"

Orion looked towards the entrance to the hospital wing. The Pettigrews were standing there and they'd heard James' last statement. At a silent gesture from Charles, who had also seen them, they came forward.

"Actually, Mr Potter, we don't blame you," Mr Pettigrew said slowly. James looked up, startled, when he heard someone who wasn't his uncle or parents talking to him. "Your uncle told us what happened, and while we're upset that Peter is dead, we don't blame you. OK?"

James slowly nodded but all the adults knew that it would take a while before he truly believed that he wasn't to blame for his friend's death. Orion winced, thinking that on some level, James might always blame himself – after all, Orion still had occasional dreams about the end of the first Triwizard Tournament, where Cedric blamed him for his death and that had been decades ago.

The Pettigrews left to make arrangements for their son's funeral and James turned his attention back to Orion. "What about Remus? Why don't you blame me for that? I was the one who stabbed him," he said, his face turning pale, and then green at the end. Realising what was going to happen, Orion conjured a bucket and waited while James vomited into it. When he was finished, Orion gave him a glass of water to rinse his mouth out and then quietly spelled the mess away.

While he was doing that, he was thinking what the best way would be to get through to James. Remembering the Triwizard Tournament, he

had an idea.

"James, you were under the Imperius curse," he started. As James nodded, Orion continued, "and that means that you weren't responsible for your actions. Garber cast the curse on you and forced you to hurt Remus because he knew it would hurt you as well. He's a sick, twisted man who gets pleasure from hurting people, and forcing family members to turn on each other is what Death Eaters like him do for fun."

"But I tried to fight it," James objected.

"There are very few people who can fight off the Imperius curse the first time they're hit with it," Orion responded firmly. "When I was a student, we were in a similar situation, except the teacher only cast the Imperius curse on us and forced us to do various humiliating things. It took me four tries before I could throw it off completely, and the rest of my classmates couldn't do it at all. The point of this, though, is that while you're under the curse, you have no control over your actions. In my mind, it wasn't you who stabbed Remus, it was Garber. That's why I don't blame you."

James looked a little better, although not much. "Did you ever watch someone die when you were a student though?" he asked.

Orion nodded. "Remember when I said that I'd been in a Triwizard Tournament when I was a student?" James nodded.

"Well, the third task was getting through a maze to find the Triwizard Cup. The first person to touch the cup was the winner. I had been entered illegally by my Defence professor who was a Death Eater in disguise, so there were four champions that year instead of three. Anyway, the French and Bulgarian champions were knocked out so it was only me and the other Hogwarts champion, Cedric Diggory left. We got to the cup at the same time and I said that we could take it together. We'd tie for it, it would still be a Hogwarts victory but both of

us would share it."

"What happened?" James asked, sensing that the next bit was painful for his uncle to talk about.

Orion surreptitiously wiped his eyes and replied, "The cup had been turned into a portkey earlier in the evening. Neither Cedric nor I knew this, so when we touched the cup it transported us to a graveyard. Voldemort was there, and Wormtail. Wormtail killed Cedric after Voldemort said, "Kill the spare." Then, Wormtail tied me to a headstone and forced me to participate in Voldemort's rebirth. I escaped and took Cedric's body back to Hogwarts but it was a near thing."

Catching James' eyes with his own, Orion asked, "Do you think, after hearing that, that I was responsible for Cedric's death?"

James shook his head. "No. You didn't know about the cup being a portkey, and it was that Wormtail guy who killed Cedric, not you. You weren't to blame."

Orion nodded and then said, "It took me a long while before I could see that, James, but can you see why you're not to blame for Remus being injured and Peter dying?"

James thought about it and then, ever so slowly, nodded. "I'm still going to have bad dreams though, aren't I?" he asked.

"Probably, at least at first," Orion said reluctantly. "However, Madam Pomfrey is giving out enough Dreamless Sleep to last for at least this next week. If you need to talk about anything though, come and see me, I don't care what time of the day or night it is."

James nodded and abruptly went limp, exhaustion catching up with him. Orion gently maneuvered him into bed, not needing to change his clothes as he was still wearing hospital wing pyjamas. He then

looked at his grandparents, who had sat silently throughout his tale.

"Should I have given him to you?" he asked.

Charles and Emma exchanged a look, and then shook their heads. "No, Orion. He needed to hear that he wasn't to blame, and he would believe it more if it came from someone who'd been through a similar experience. He needed you just now. He'll need each of us for different things at various points in his life, and he needed you more than us right then. We don't mind."

Orion nodded, and looked over to where Remus and Severus were stirring. Getting up, he made his way to their beds, sitting down between them. Severus was the first to open his eyes, and he gave his father a weak smile upon seeing him.

"Hi Dad," he said. His voice was a bit raspy from aftereffects of the Cruciatus and he winced when he moved his arm, but at least he was awake. Orion swallowed hard, and gently wrapped his arms round his son.

"Are you OK?" he asked, barely managing to keep the tremble out of his voice.

Severus looked up at him, frowning. His dad looked like he was about to cry, and his dad never cried. "Are you alright, Dad?"

Orion looked shocked. "Which one of us was hit with the Cruciatus recently? I'm fine, now that I know you're going to recover. He gently ruffled Severus' hair, smiling as his Slytherin son made his usual complaint about that gesture, and looked over to Remus, who was squinting as he opened his eyes.

"Dad," Remus said hoarsely.

Orion didn't care who saw him, he gathered Remus into a tight hug

and bowed his head, tears dripping from his eyes and falling into Remus' hair. "You're alive," he whispered. "I thought you were going to die." A noise from Severus' bed had him turning his head. Seeing that Severus looked rather left out, he made the two beds merge into one big bed and sat in the middle of it, pulling both his sons to him. While they squirmed around to make themselves comfortable, he relaxed fully as he absorbed the knowledge that his sons were out of danger. The emotional and psychological trauma they could deal with later, for now, he was just happy that they were alive. He gave no thought to his own emotional state; he was only concerned with how the events surrounding Garber would affect his children.

Hogwarts' guest rooms had never had so many occupants before. All the parents had insisted on staying, and Dumbledore had opened up the guest suites, not wanting to be seen throwing parents out of the school, even if he didn't like them being at Hogwarts. Funerals for the dead students were held, and the whole school attended them. Slytherin and Gryffindor students had stopped fighting out of respect for each other's losses and Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw students offered general help and support. The Marauders had been almost inconsolable at Peter's funeral, all of them spending the funeral wrapped in their parents' arms. Lily had followed suit, sitting in between her parents and being hugged by both of them.

Several mind-healers had been called in to offer counseling to the students and anyone else that needed it, and all the students who had been in the class took advantage of it. All classes had been suspended for two weeks to give the students a chance to recover from the shock of what had happened. Defence Against the Dark Arts classes had been cancelled until further notice, to give Dumbledore a chance to find a new teacher. Orion had noticed the headmaster staring speculatively at him on more than one occasion and hoped that Dumbledore wasn't going to do something stupid like manipulate him into teaching the Defence Against the Dark Arts for the rest of the year.

Several days after the last funeral, Professor McGonagall was on her nightly patrol when she heard soft sobs coming from the Transfiguration classroom, accompanied by low murmurs. Opening the door, she found all four Marauders sitting on the floor, and Lily in amongst them. Lily had been the one crying, although the boys looked to be holding back tears through sheer willpower.

"Professor McGonagall," James stuttered as he noticed her. He tried to get up and winced as his shoulder hit the corner of a nearby desk.

"It's alright," the professor reassured them, entering the room fully and closing the door. "Do you want to talk to me about anything?"

The Marauders looked at each other and then Severus said, "Actually, Professor, we were hoping to talk to Dad, but we got turned round, the stairs changed on us and we couldn't remember where his rooms were."

Professor McGonagall nodded. She wasn't upset at her offer being refused, in her experience, if a child was worried or upset about something, and their parent or parents were available, then it made sense to speak to them and not to a teacher.

"I'll take you there," she said.

The Marauders looked shocked and Remus said, "Er, Professor, aren't you going to take points?"

Professor McGonagall shook her head. "No, you're obviously upset, and leaving the dormitory to find a teacher, or in your case, your father, is perfectly acceptable." She led them to the portrait guarding Orion's rooms, a large one depicting a lion and a snake sleeping, with the snake twined affectionately round the lion.

Raising her hand, Professor McGonagall knocked firmly on the door and waited. Shuffling noises were heard and then the portrait swung

open. Orion looked out, and frowned briefly before waving them in. As they entered, he flicked a hand at his desk, and a small journal closed itself and then hopped into the open drawer. Another flick of a finger and the drawer closed itself and then locked.

"What's wrong?" Orion asked quietly.

The five students all looked at him with varying degrees of distress and then Remus pulled Lily towards Orion and pushed her into his arms. Orion automatically closed his arms round the distressed younger version of his mother even as he requested an explanation.

"We can't get what happened out of our heads," Sirius said through chattering teeth. "The dreamless sleep potion doesn't work, and we see the events over and over again."

"Peter accuses all of us of not saving him, and then Garber tortures you and then he kills everyone," Remus added with a shiver.

Orion frowned as he lit the fire and provided warm, thick dressing gowns. "I take it you couldn't sleep tonight and came to find me?"

"Lily was crying and we couldn't seem to comfort her. We thought you might be able to help," Severus said, trying to sound calm and practical but the haunted look in his eyes told Orion that he was also close to tears.

"Do you want me to let go?" he asked Lily, his tone gentle as she shifted a bit in his embrace. Lily shook her head.

"No, feel safe," she mumbled, before falling asleep. Seeing that she was comfortable, Orion looked up at McGonagall who hadn't yet left.

"Is it alright if they stay?" he asked.

The Gryffindor Head of House nodded. "I'll inform Horace," she said,

and Orion nodded, knowing that she meant the Slytherin Head of House. She left, and Orion was left with five upset students who needed reassurance.

"Oof," he muttered as he was abruptly assaulted by three other bodies. James, Severus, and Remus had decided that they didn't want to be left out and had crowded round him.

"Hang on guys," he said, before conjuring several sleeping bags. "Lily, James, Sirius, do you want me to get your parents?"

They shook their heads and clung to him. "No, they wouldn't understand," James muttered. "I love Mum and Dad, but, they haven't gone through what we have, through what you have, Uncle Orion. You understand, in a way they don't."

Orion slowly nodded, realizing that what James said was true, even if he felt as though he was stepping on the other parents' toes a bit. Searching his mind, he found Godric's Hollow and said, "Any advice would be appreciated."

Silence was all he heard for a few minutes before the older version of Sirius answered, "James is right, our younger selves need you right now. Don't worry about our parents, they'll understand."

"What about your younger self, Mum, isn't me cuddling her like this a tad inappropriate?"

His mother chuckled. "No, Harry, it's not. She knows you, her parents know you. You're part of the family, a trusted family friend, and have been for years. If she wants comfort from you it would be inappropriate and insensitive to push her away."

"Oh, Harry," the older version of Severus broke in. "That little speech to Garber after you'd dragged him up the stairs was truly magnificent."

"Well I did have a good teacher," Orion responded, before breaking off the conversation with his family and hugging Lily a bit tighter. She responded by cuddling further into his embrace. James, Severus and Sirius wormed their way into his arms too and when Sirius looked like he was going to leave, James pulled him into the group hug as well.

There was a groaning sound and the chair Orion was sitting on collapsed, throwing all of them to the floor. Orion ended up on the bottom of the pile, half-crushed. The Marauders rolled off him and after a bit of struggling and accidentally banging heads together, they found their own sleeping bags. As they were going to sleep, Remus said sleepily, "Dad, could you transform into Leo?"

Sirius and Lily gave him odd looks, and he explained, "When we were younger, whenever we were upset, he'd always stay with us as Leo. There's something about sleeping next to his lion form that's incredibly comforting."

Orion shrugged when Sirius and Lily looked at him in surprise and obligingly transformed. When Professor McGonagall looked into the room upon her return, she had to smile. Leo was curled up in the middle of a pile of bodies covered in red and green sleeping bags, and all of them were sleeping peacefully. Conjuring a camera, the witch quietly took a photo before leaving, knowing that the occupants of the room would be OK for the rest of the night.

That evening, while Leo slept, Orion was busy discussing the events with his family in Godric's Hollow. He was taking the opportunity to vent his own feelings, having suppressed them while he helped his children deal with the immediate aftermath. Severus and Remus found themselves in tight hugs, and James was also hugged after Orion had been persuaded to let them go. Sirius and Lily watched this with sympathy, knowing that the whole event had been as scary for Orion as it had been for the children.

After several hours, Orion had finally talked himself out, and was sitting on the sofa with his head pillowed on James' lap, while his father ran his fingers through his hair. Severus, Sirius, and Lily talked to him quietly, reassuring him that he did all he could, and he couldn't have done any more.

"But what about Peter?" Orion mumbled as he sat up. "How am I supposed to tell James that the friend who took a Killing Curse for him ended up betraying him in the future?"

"You very firmly distinguish between Peter and Wormtail," James replied firmly. "The Peter Pettigrew who was our friend died the minute he became a Death Eater. Wormtail wasn't a Marauder, he was a traitor and we shouldn't have trusted him. Peter, in this time was a good friend, and he showed that by his actions. Do not confuse him with the Wormtail that you knew."

Orion nodded. "OK. I suppose I should go back now. Thanks for helping me out, I didn't fancy talking to that mind-healer, and I know the kids didn't like it much."

"Why don't you like talking to mind-healers – their job is to help people deal with traumatic events," Lily asked.

Orion grimaced. "Because none of them could ever keep their mouths shut about the fact that they were treating the Man-Who-Killed-You-Know-Who. After two times where what we discussed in confidence made it onto the front page of the Daily Prophet I gave up and resorted to writing in a journal. It, and talking to people I trusted," he glanced at Severus, who gave a tiny nod in response, "worked better than talking with a stranger. I think the kids feel the same way."

"My younger self did mention something to that effect," James agreed, ruffling Orion's hair affectionately. "Go and get some sleep," he added, "you need it. The second task is coming up soon."

Orion growled half-heartedly. "Somehow that doesn't seem very important at the moment," he muttered. A pointed look from James quelled his resistance though and with a mocking salute he vanished.

Several days later, a headline announced, "Former Hogwarts professor found dead in Ministry holding cells." No witnesses or suspects were ever found and the case quietly disappeared. For the students involved, the routine of classes and the support of parents and friends helped to speed their recovery, and soon, the school was buzzing once more with anticipation for the next expected event: the second task of the Triwizard Tournament.

Chapter Thirty-One: Lead-Up to the Yule Ball, and Hufflepuff's Cup

James, Sirius, Severus, Remus, and Lily sat down to breakfast a month after the disastrous DADA class feeling excited and energized. Dumbledore had planned to announce the new DADA teacher that morning, and speculation on who it was going to be had run rampant throughout the student grapevine.

"Uncle Orion's been looking very unhappy about something lately, and I don't think it's what happened to Garber that's done it," James said to Remus, who looked at the staff table thoughtfully. He spotted his father immediately, and James was right, Orion was scowling in Dumbledore's direction, while speaking quietly and intently to Professor McGonagall. The students quieted as the headmaster stood up, all eager to hear who would be their new DADA teacher.

"As you all know, we've had a month of no Defence Against the Dark Arts classes, due to the deplorable actions of our previous professor," Dumbledore stated. He waited for the muttering to die down before continuing. "We lost several fine students that day, who will always be remembered, and many other students in that particular class were injured. While this is tragic, we must move on, and who better to take over the teaching of Defence Against the Dark Arts than one who demonstrated his ability in this area so ably when faced with a genuine threat to not only himself but to the students of that class. On that note, your new Defence Against the Dark Arts professor is...Professor Potter."

James, Remus, and Severus gaped in shock and then began to clap as Orion reluctantly stood up. Recognising the man who had saved them from Garber a month earlier, the third year Gryffindors and Slytherins also stood up and cheered. Orion remained standing as the cheers died down and then cleared his throat.

"Thank you, Professor Dumbledore, for appointing me," he said with a slight nod in the old wizard's direction. Looking out at the students

he said, "I can't promise to be the world's best teacher, but I can promise that all of you will be safe with me. I'm not a Death Eater," he said with a grin, which sparked a few nervous chuckles from the students. Deciding to finish his impromptu speech, Orion said, "I'll see you all in class at some point this week then," and sat down.

Several minutes after he'd sat down, the post came in. A large black owl landed in front of Orion, bearing a red envelope that the students instantly recognized as a Howler. Orion raised an eyebrow and opened it, wondering who would send him a Howler. He didn't think Charles or Emma would, they would be more likely to come and yell at him in person if they thought he'd done something worthy of being yelled at.

"POTTER!" the Howler screamed at him. "HOW DARE YOU KILL MY SERVANT! HOW DARE YOU TELL THE STUDENTS NOT TO JOIN ME! I AM THE HEIR OF SLYTHERIN, THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO JOIN ME AND SAVE THE WORLD FROM THE MUDBLOODS AND MUGGLE-LOVERS WHO ARE KILLING THE WIZARDING WORLD! IF YOU DARE INTERFERE WITH MY PLANS AGAIN I WILL KILL YOU AND YOUR ENTIRE FAMILY!"

Orion chuckled and shook his head as the Howler ripped itself up in front of him. He looked out at the silent, flabbergasted students, and rolled his eyes. Smiling sardonically, he said, "That, if you couldn't tell, was from the idiot who calls himself a Dark Lord. I personally thought that he sounded more like a toddler having a temper tantrum just then. There's only one real way to deal with those."

So saying, he pulled a piece of parchment out of his pocket and spent several minutes writing on it. He looked it over and, evidently satisfied with the results, he said, "Do you want to hear what my reply is?"

No one spoke for a minute until Lucius Malfoy stood up and said, "Yes, Professor, we would. If you don't mind that is."

Orion looked at the teachers, who nodded faintly at him. Smirking, he held up the parchment and said, "Here is what it says: Lord Voldemort. How old are you? Your letter sounded like a toddler having a temper tantrum, and I strongly dislike being subjected to that sort of pointless rant. Your claim that you are the Heir of Slytherin is ridiculous, as I have personally met the true heir and he strongly dislikes the actions you have taken thus far. I would advise you to cease your campaign of terror before you end up rotting in an unmarked grave somewhere." He paused, and when he finished the note, his tone was a lot more menacing. "If you ever try to make good on your threat against me or my family, I will kill you very slowly and very painfully. My final word of advice is this: Get over your father issues and GROW UP!" Having finished reading it, he folded it up, put it in an envelope and sent it off with the owl that had brought the Howler.

The students and staff sat in stunned silence for a minute before a small snort of laughter came from the Gryffindor table. The laughter spread until the majority of the students were hanging on to each other for support as they imagined Voldemort's reaction to their new professor's reply. The staff weren't much better, and Dumbledore's eyes were twinkling brightly as he sat there, highly amused. Standing up, he clapped his hands for attention, and said, "Now that the entertainment is over, we should all get to class."

As the students exited the hall, the staff left through their entrance, many of them quietly congratulating Orion on the reply to Voldemort's Howler. Orion responded politely to their comments, but he was also having a mental conversation with his spirit family, in particular, Severus and Remus.

"What am I supposed to do, I can't teach the students," he said, fighting back the panic that was threatening to overwhelm him.

"Yes you can, Harry," Remus said soothingly. "Just think of it like a

formalized, structured version of the DA, with different levels. Besides, your first class is the third year Gryffindors and Slytherins. They already respect you; you can build on that and take things from there. You'll be fine."

Severus added his opinion as well. "Although no one told you, Harry, the students who attended that little DA club of yours in your fifth year got consistently high marks on their Defence OWLs, more than the ones who didn't attend. If you need advice, we're here to give it, or you can go to the other staff members. You're not the first teacher they've had who has needed help with various aspects of teaching, and they'll be more than willing to offer advice."

Orion nodded, thanked them, and walked into the class. Five minutes later, the third year Gryffindors and Slytherins walked in. Orion noticed immediately that instead of being separate, the two Houses were intermingled and the barrier which had been broken the day Garber had snapped and attacked them seemed to be non-existent. There was still a little bit of wariness but the open hostility had disappeared, for which Orion was thankful.

"Well," he said once they'd sat down. "Like I said in the great hall, you are perfectly safe with me. Before I begin the lesson, is there anything any of you want to talk about regarding the last time we met."

The students were silent for a few minutes and many of them glanced uneasily at the empty seats which used to be filled with their classmates. James looked up at Orion, his eyes full of pain as he slowly raised his hand.

"Yes, James," Orion said. Since James, Severus, and Remus were all in the class, calling them all Mr Potter would have been confusing, so he resorted to using their names, while using the more formal mode of address for the rest of the class.

James swallowed and said, "Why did Garber attack us? Why did he kill our friends, and hurt the rest of us?"

Orion sighed and sat on the corner of his desk. He looked first at James, and then at the rest of the class, who looked upset at the reminder of what had happened. "Garber was a Death Eater," he began, choosing his words carefully. "They like torturing and killing people for fun. The problem with your former professor was that no one knew he was a Death Eater until that day, and he took advantage of his position to hurt you simply for his own amusement. You should not have learnt of those curses until your sixth or seventh year, and even then, it's only theory, with demonstrations being done on spiders. You should never have been subjected to those curses, and I will always regret not getting there fast enough to prevent your friends from dying."

He looked around the room and frowned. "Where is Mr Malfoy?" he asked.

The Slytherins looked at each other and then Nott said, "Um, Malfoy's a fourth year, sir, he was only in our class because he missed his own class' demonstration and since he had a free period, he asked to join ours for that one time."

Orion frowned. "Garber tortured the fourth years as well?"

Nott shook his head. "No, sir. That demonstration was on spiders, like you said."

Orion nodded in response and said, "Thank you, Mr Nott. With that sorted out, I will say this: We have a lot to catch up on thanks to the last month that we've missed, so while I will be working from your former professor's lesson plans, I may change things round a bit. He had this lesson down for the theory of the Unforgivable curses, but I think we've all had enough of that."

"Um, sir," Lily said hesitantly.

"Yes, Miss Evans," Orion responded.

"Er, could we do the theory? It might help, you know, to know the theory so that we can forget that this happened."

Orion looked around, seeing the students' gazes fixed intently on him. "Very well," he said reluctantly. "But after today, there will be no more work on this topic, and I will ensure that it doesn't appear on your exams."

He shifted position on the desk and began the lesson, covering each Unforgivable thoroughly, making sure to include the information that at one point, they were legal curses, and giving examples of where they were still legal, such as using the Cruciatus curse in precisely measured doses to help cure nerve paralysis, and using the Killing Curse to give mercy to a terminally ill patient. The students wrote down the information, occasionally asking questions to clarify points that they didn't understand. When the bell rang, they looked up, startled. Orion was also startled; he'd been enjoying the lesson, even though the subject was a painful and disturbing one.

"Right, well, later this week, we'll get back to what you should have been working on. No homework this time but you'll definitely have some next time," he said shooing them from the room. He had a free period before his next class and he spent it alternating between familiarizing himself with the lesson plan for his sixth year class and discussing the previous lesson with the teachers in his head. Finding out that they approved of the way he'd handled the sensitive topic helped give him a badly needed boost of confidence, so that when the sixth years walked in, he was ready to teach them the fine art of silent spell-casting.

As Christmas approached, the students began to get more excited about the Yule Ball than their schoolwork. The third year Gryffindors

and Slytherins were his last class of the day before the Christmas break started, and both teacher and students were looking forward to it.

"Can any of you tell me why the Protego shield charm is useless against high power curses, hexes, or jinxes?" he asked, bringing to an end the impromptu quiz session he'd been holding that lesson. The questions had covered what they'd learnt the previous two years, as well as everything they'd learnt this year with the exception of the Unforgivable curses as it was an easy and fun way to check whether they'd learnt the material without subjecting the students to a formal test.

"Because the shield is useful only against low power spells, to make it hold against the high power spells you need the Protego Maxima shield, or another more powerful shield, Lily answered promptly.

Orion nodded, pleased, and awarded her team, which consisted of her, James, Sirius, Remus, and Severus, another point. He paused to take a sip from his goblet of pumpkin juice, having a drink available if he needed one was very handy.

"That concludes the lesson. You've all done really well in catching up to where we should be at this time of year, and you deserve to have a..." he stopped talking when he felt a tingling sensation on his head and his mouth suddenly felt too small. Fur sprang up on his arms and face and he closed his eyes in irritation.

"You are all dismissed with the exception of the Marauders," he growled, the words still understandable despite the distinctly feline appearance of his face. The room emptied, leaving James, Sirius, Remus, Severus and Lily sitting in their seats. Orion looked at Lily with a puzzled expression. "Lily, I don't believe you were in on this prank, you can go as well."

Lily gave the four boys a shrug and quickly gathered up her books,

leaving shortly afterwards. Orion pinched the bridge of his nose and then said, "When will it wear off?"

"Not long, Dad," Severus said, trying not to laugh. The sight of his furry father was really very funny, even though they were probably in trouble for it. An inarticulate growl from Orion prompted him to continue and he elaborated, "Only half an hour. Not long."

"Why did you do it? I thought I told all of you that I was off-limits when it came to staff pranks," Orion said through gritted teeth. "I know it's Christmas soon, but did you stop to think that the Yule Ball is in a week's time and if this hadn't worn off, I might have had to go to the ball in this furry state!"

The Marauders winced. "We didn't think of that," James admitted softly. "We just thought that it might look suspicious to the rest of the staff if you weren't pranked now and again. They might question why you weren't being pranked, and start thinking that you helped us."

Orion sighed. "I am old enough to defend myself from any such accusations, and as for why I wasn't being pranked, well, you, James, are my nephew, and Remus and Severus are my children. It stands to reason that I would forbid you from pranking me."

Seeing the downcast looks, he dropped into a chair and abruptly chuckled. At the startled looks from the Marauders, he shook his head. "I can appreciate a joke, boys, and if this had happened over the holiday itself, I wouldn't have minded. It's the fact that you did it in front of the class that I don't like. While in class, I'm your professor, and I need a certain amount of authority to be able to do my job effectively. Pranks might be good outside class, but I want you to pay attention and actually work while in class. Got it?"

"Got it," his captive audience said glumly.

Orion nodded. "OK. Now, I really should take points or something but

given that this is the first time you've done it, I'll let you off with a warning. Should this be repeated, and I don't just mean in my class but with any of your teachers, you can expect a detention, which won't be at all fun. Am I clear?"

The boys nodded and left quickly once he'd given them permission. Inside the room, Orion dropped his head into his hands and gave in to the laughter that had been threatening since he'd felt the prank take hold. It was audacious, pranking him in front of the entire class, but nothing less than what he expected from them and that's why he'd let them off. Shaking his head, he stepped out into the hall, almost running into Professor McGonagall, who took one look at his furry appearance and smiled.

"So the Marauders finally got you," she said, falling in beside him as they walked to his quarters.

Orion chuckled. "Yes, but I don't mind so much. I've told them that pranks are expressly forbidden in all of their classes, but that outside of class they're allowed. I also said that I am old enough to defend myself if the rest of the staff starts wondering if I'm helping them."

McGonagall chuckled. "So that's why they didn't prank you for so long. Have you helped them at all?"

Orion shook his head. "No, they're doing well enough on their own. I thought that the Halloween prank was inspired."

"You would," McGonagall replied a bit sourly. She brightened as she thought of a new topic, and said, "Have you got a partner for the ball?"

Orion groaned. "Everyone's asking me that question. What would you do if I asked you?"

McGonagall looked shocked. "I would accept, but I'm sure that I

heard your children mentioning that you already had a partner."

"I do. I was wondering if you might save a dance for me though," Orion said with a sidelong glance at his companion.

McGonagall blushed a bit before replying, "Of course I will. Thank you."

Orion bowed briefly to her. "In that case I will look forward to it, and I will see you at dinner." Having reached his quarters, he opened the portrait and went inside. McGonagall chuckled and continued on to her own, anticipating the ball with more enthusiasm than she'd had up until then.

A few days later, Orion had to deal with the Marauders again, and this time it was less pleasant than just warning them about a prank. As he was on his way to lunch, after finishing checking his robes for the ball night, the sounds of a fight made his ears prick up. Following the sounds to an abandoned classroom, he peered inside.

James and Severus were in the middle of an all-out fistfight, while Remus and Sirius were trying to pull them apart. Lily was sitting on the floor alternately pleading with them all to stop and hiding her face so she didn't have to watch. Growling under his breath, Orion threw the door open, causing all activity inside to stop immediately.

"Exactly what do you think you're doing?" he demanded, taking in the broken wrist and black eyes that James was sporting and Severus' bloody, broken, nose and split lip. Both boys were breathing shallowly, as though their ribs were bruised, and they might well be, Orion thought sourly, seeing the bruises beginning to show on their abdomens through the rips in their shirts. Bruises adorned Remus and Sirius as well, but Orion wasn't inclined to heal any of the injuries until he had his explanation.

"He asked Lily to the ball when he knew I was going to ask her,"

James said, pointing at Severus, who sneered at him in disgust.

"If he asked her first then you have only yourself to blame," Orion stated evenly. "Which one of you threw the first punch?"

"He did," Severus and James answered instantly, both pointing accusing fingers at each other. Orion sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose.

"Boys," he said, a clear warning in his tone. Severus and James looked at each other and then stubbornly looked away.

"Remus, Sirius, do you have anything to say about all this?" Orion asked, feeling that he might get the information from them, if the two principal ones involved in the fight wouldn't talk.

"Um, well," Remus began, stopping hurriedly at a glare from his brother. Noticing the byplay, Orion growled again, the sound clearly audible this time. Remus and Severus swallowed hard; they knew that growl meant that their father was close to completely losing his patience. When Orion glanced at Severus again, he gave into the inevitable.

"I threw the first punch," he admitted. "Only because James insulted us," he added quickly upon seeing his father's frown deepen. "He called me a slimy Slytherin, and when I said that he was insulting you as well, he didn't take it back so I hit him."

"And Lily?" Orion questioned.

"I asked her first, and she said yes, it's not my fault that James' vaunted Gryffindor courage deserted him before he could ask her," Severus replied, sneering at his cousin once more.

"James, what do you have to say about this?" Orion deliberately changed the direction of the conversation, hoping to startle James

into talking. It worked, James was angry over Severus' insinuation that he wasn't brave enough to ask Lily to the ball, and also worried about whether or not his uncle would tell his father about the incident.

"He threw the first punch, but I did insult him first," he said quietly. "I didn't mean to insult you too, Uncle Orion, I forgot that you were the Heir of Slytherin." Orion's scowl didn't lessen so he hurriedly continued, "And I was angry over him asking Lily to the ball, even though he knew I wanted to take her, so I insulted him, and then he punched me, and it all got out of control."

"I can see that," Orion responded bitingly. "What about you, Remus, and Sirius? Did you not think that perhaps fetching one of the staff members, even if they weren't me, would have been a better option than trying to break up the fight yourself?"

Remus and Sirius looked rather ashamed of themselves. "We wanted to break it up before anyone noticed," Sirius volunteered. Although he'd seen Orion annoyed with Remus and Severus before, this was the first time that he'd been included with them and he found that having his best friends' father annoyed with him wasn't very nice.

"To avoid obvious consequences like detention and lost points perhaps," Orion prodded, knowing he was right when the Marauders all found looking at the floor more interesting than looking at him. Looking at the four miscreants, he shook his head in disgust, before pulling four chairs towards him with magic.

"Sit," he said, his tone still carrying more than a hint of irritation. The Marauders obediently sat on the vacant chairs, while Orion crouched down in front of Lily.

"Are you alright?" he asked.

Lily looked up and nodded. Her eyes were wet but she didn't look as though she'd been crying, or at least, not for too long. Orion conjured

a hanky and handed it to her, steadying her while she wiped her face, and then helped her to stand up.

"Do you need to see Madam Pomphrey?"

Lily shook her head again. "No, Professor, I'll be fine," she said. "May I say something to Severus and James?"

Orion nodded, curious to see what Lily would say to them. He was shocked when she walked up to James and slapped him across the face, before repeating her actions with Severus. "You idiots!" she seethed. "I'm not some sort of trophy that has to be won! Leave me alone." Turning to Remus, who shrank back in anticipation of the same punishment she'd dealt out to his brother and cousin, she seemed to deflate a bit.

"Remus, do you have a partner for the ball yet?" she asked. He shook his head dumbly, and Lily smiled. "Will you go to the ball with me?" she asked.

Too shocked to speak, Remus simply nodded, unable to believe his good luck. He looked uncertainly over at Orion, suddenly realizing that his father had the ability, should he so choose, to bar them all from the ball itself. Lily had realized this too and she stood in front of Remus and Sirius, looking directly into Orion's eyes.

"Please, sir, don't punish Remus and Sirius too hard. They were trying to break it up, and yes, they should have gone for a teacher but they didn't want me to be hurt. They were defending me as much as breaking up James and Sev," she said.

Orion stood silently throughout the speech, and all the Marauders, both the younger and older versions waited to hear what his decision was.

"I would not have barred any of you from the ball," he said slowly,

causing the Marauders to sigh with relief. "However," he said, his tone sharpening and becoming harsher, "you do have to have some consequences for your actions. James, Severus, for the first three weeks following the Christmas holidays, you will serve detention every night with either Professor McGonagall, Mr Filch, or myself. You have also lost Slytherin and Gryffindor twenty-five points each. Sirius, Remus, I appreciate that you were trying to break up the fight, and protecting Lily, but you still should have got a teacher rather than try to keep it a secret. For that, you will serve a week of detention, it being the first week following the holidays."

"Twenty-five points each!" James and Severus couldn't believe their ears, Orion had so far not taken a single point off any house, and now he was choosing to take off that many at once. It wasn't fair.

"Do you wish me to make it fifty each?" Orion enquired and the two boys shook their heads immediately. Their lives wouldn't be worth living if that happened.

"What about me?" Lily asked, and Orion looked at her with a puzzled expression.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Well, I could have got a teacher too and I didn't so..." she trailed off with a shrug.

"Are you actually asking for detention?" Orion couldn't believe his ears.

"No, but, well, it doesn't really seem fair that Remus and Sirius get detention for something which I also failed to do," she pointed out.

"If you truly feel that way then you are of course free to join Remus and Sirius, but I won't compel you too," Orion said, silently asking his mother if her younger self was being serious or not. Lily looked a bit

happier at this and nodded, this way, she could feel like she was paying the same price as her friends without it going on her record like it would on theirs.

"Thank you," Lily said, before casting a contemptuous look at James and Severus, who were now starting to feel the pain of their injuries as the adrenaline wore off. Orion noticed as well and crouched down in front of the injured boys.

"May I stay and watch?" Lily asked from behind him. Orion nodded absently and heard a chair being moved from its previous place as Lily watched the healing process with an intense concentration.

First on the list were the broken bones. Although Orion wasn't Madam Pomphrey - and he suspected he'd be getting an earful from her about healing injured students himself rather than leaving it to her – he could heal broken bones, having had to do it numerous times in his job when his team healer had been hurt or otherwise unavailable. He fixed Severus' nose, and then moved to James' wrist. Tapping it, he saw what looked to be a nasty compound fracture and he frowned. Clean breaks he could do, something as delicate as a compound fracture of the wrist he couldn't.

"I can't fix this; it will have to be done by Madam Pomphrey. Severus' nose was a clean break, all it needed was to be straightened and then healed, but this is different."

"Can you at least dull the pain?" James' eyes were bright with unshed tears, the pain of his broken wrist bringing the almost fourteen-year-old close to tears. Orion nodded and tapped the wrist gently. Annoyed about the fight he may be, but he wasn't angry enough to ignore the obvious pain his future father was in. Besides, there was his duty as a professor to consider, that being to protect and care for all the students at the school, even if their injuries were their own fault.

With his wrist no longer sending bolts of agony up his arm, James was able to accept with more dignity the healing of his black eyes and various bruises. Severus' lip was also healed, as were the bruises adorning Remus and Sirius. Once the injuries had been taken care of, Orion stood.

"James, come with me to the infirmary. The rest of you go to the great hall, lunch should still be there if you hurry." His voice was cool but not angry, and the students hurried to obey, while Orion led James in the direction of the infirmary.

The walk up was silent, James opened his mouth to try and apologise, but one look at his uncle's face silenced him. Orion was still annoyed, that much was obvious, and the stern lines that his face had set in did not invite conversation. When they reached the infirmary, Orion quickly explained the situation to Madam Pomphrey and watched while she healed James' wrist, silently noting how to do it so that he would know how if he needed to do it in the future. Once he was healed, James slid off the bed and stood uncertainly in front of his uncle, wondering what was going to happen next.

"Come with me, lunch should just be finishing but we can get some from the kitchens," Orion said eventually. James jumped, startled, but obeyed silently, not wanting to risk annoying his uncle further. The walk to the kitchens was silent as well until James risked a question.

"Um, how do you know the way to the kitchens?"

Orion looked down at his future father and then smiled. "When I was hungry but not feeling up to going to the great hall, I used to come down here for a snack. The house elves are always happy to help, as long as you don't get in their way too much," he responded. He knew that James was feeling uneasy around him at the moment and while that saddened him, he knew that he couldn't relent – had he not broken up the fight when he did, the injuries could have been a lot worse, which was why the punishment had been harsher than what

another professor might have given out.

"Oh," James said. "Er, sorry about insulting you," he said, feeling that he might as well say it, even if it garnered a negative reaction. Orion said nothing for a moment and then his hand dropped down and ruffled James's hair affectionately.

"Apology accepted, even though I'm not the one you should be apologizing to. After lunch, find Severus and Lily and apologise to them, and then I want to talk to all of you in my rooms."

James nodded and ran the rest of the way to the great hall, sliding into his seat and just managing to get the last remains of lunch, even though he'd eaten in the kitchens. He quickly carried out his uncle's instructions and passed on his request, which made the other Marauders pale a bit, but nonetheless, immediately after lunch, they met in Orion's quarters, wondering what he had to say to them now.

It turned out to be nothing terribly traumatizing. Orion reminded them all that they were friends first and foremost and it was silly, in his opinion, to let something like a dance come between them like it had. The ball was supposed to be something that was organized so that the students could mingle and have fun without house barriers coming between them all the time like they did during classes. Severus and James looked more and more ashamed of themselves as he continued, and at the end, they looked at each other and apologised more sincerely than they had at lunch. After that, they turned to Lily and apologised to her as well. She accepted the apologies but stated that she wasn't going to change her partner now, although she in turn apologised for hitting them.

As they were going out the door, Orion called James and Severus back. They stopped and looked curiously at him.

"What's wrong?" Severus asked. "We all apologised to each other, Remus is going to the ball with Lily, lucky him, and we're all friends

again. Is there anything else that needs to be said?"

"There is," Orion said, looking at both of them intently. "I didn't say it in front of the others, because it pertains to you two alone, but I feel it has to be said. Do you remember what I said happened with me and my best friend?"

"The one who attacked you?" James asked, frowning.

"Yes. Your situation today reminded me very strongly of that, and I won't stand by and let you two go down the same road without at least trying to stop it. I lost my family because of my former friend's inability to accept that our mutual friend had chosen me rather than him for a husband, and I don't want to see that happen again."

James and Severus looked shocked at the news that they could be on the same path which had led to so much pain for their uncle/father, and eventually Severus said, "Um, what do we do to avoid it?"

"If you both want her for a girlfriend in later years, you each let her know of your interest in her and you then let her make her choice. No matter what that choice is, you accept it, even if it's hard to do," Orion said firmly. "I don't expect that situation to crop up anytime soon, you're too young yet, but just remember, changing relationships do not have to mean the death of a strong friendship."

James and Severus looked at him wordlessly for several minutes before leaving as he dismissed them. They were both subdued as they walked to their respective common rooms, and silently vowed to never let a relationship harm their friendship.

Back in his room, Orion was pulled out of his reminiscences when a tapping at the window alerted him to an owl. He let it in and opened the letter it gave him. Blinking furiously, he read it again, and then a third time. By the time he put it down, he was smiling broadly. Reaching for a scrap of parchment, he scribbled a note to Croaker.

Second to last item discovered. Recovery will commence after Christmas.

He sent it off and resisted the urge to jump around the room. Hufflepuff's cup had been found, and that meant that very soon, Voldemort would be down to just one Horcrux. Grinning, Orion found himself eagerly anticipating one of the best Christmas presents he could get that year – one Dark Lord with only one Horcrux left.

Chapter Thirty Two: The Yule Ball and Horcrux Retrieval

The night of the Yule Ball was what Orion would later describe as organized chaos. The students were all inside the Great Hall, and the champions were outside, waiting to enter. They were lined up according to how they were doing in points after the first task. Orion was second in line as his points total was second overall. His date was Eagle, whose real name was Laura. First in line was one of the Bulgarian champions, Alexsandar Krum, who was a few seconds faster through the obstacle course than Orion had been. Behind Orion was the two French competitors, then Abraxas Malfoy, and then finally, the other Bulgarian champion. All the champions were waiting somewhat apprehensively for the doors to open – they knew they'd be expected to open the dancing and none of them liked that.

Suddenly the doors swung open and with a slight sigh, the champions started forward. They walked down an aisle formed by the students, and onto the dance floor. From the corner of his eye, Orion spotted the Marauders, looking alternately excited and uncomfortable in their dress robes, surrounded by a knot of Slytherin and Gryffindor students who all smiled when they saw him. Orion smiled back, and then looked straight ahead, mentally running through the steps of the dance that he and Laura would soon be doing.

"Hey, Orion, no need to be so tense," she whispered from beside him.

"I can't help it, it's been a while since I've done this," he murmured back. He heard her chuckle and then she turned to face him on the dance floor.

"Come on you big scaredy cat," she said with a mocking gleam in her eyes. "We'll show everyone how it's done."

"Scaredy cat?" Orion retorted as the music started to play. "I'm a wolf,

not a cat."

Further talking was unnecessary as he began to lead her round the floor, and as his feet fell into a familiar rhythm he relaxed and let himself go. He was only partially aware of the students and staff joining them and was therefore surprised when he found himself dancing next to Remus.

"Enjoying yourself?" he asked when the musicians took a break.

Remus nodded. "Yeah, it's really cool, Dad. James and Severus are enjoying themselves too, they've got their own partners, but Lily said she'd save a dance for each of them."

"That was nice of her," Orion responded. "Want to switch partners?"

Remus looked confused, so Lily, after exchanging a brief look with Laura, helped him out. "He means this," she said, and then the two witches pushed their respective partners towards each other.

"Oy," Orion called as he abruptly found himself dancing with Remus, which caused a lot of confusion as both of them automatically tried to lead. Letting go of his son, Orion shook his head. "Never underestimate a witch," he muttered, causing Remus to laugh.

"Do you want a drink, Dad?" he asked, and Orion looked down at him.

"That sounds nice, yes, thanks," he replied, following Remus to the refreshments. Spotting a spare table, he sat down at it, being joined by Laura a few minutes later. James and Severus wandered over, followed by their dates, and Remus joined them as well. Sirius didn't, as he was busy talking with his father, who had come as one of the guests. Charles and Emma hadn't come as they were away visiting distant relatives, although they'd wished Orion good luck for the second task.

As he finished his drink, Orion spotted Professor McGonagall standing at the edge of the dance floor. Smiling he excused himself and made his way over to her. Laura watched him go, knowing what he was going to do, as he'd discussed it with her beforehand. To the astonishment of the Marauders, and the rest of the student body present, Orion led the Head of Gryffindor out onto the dance floor. They barely noticed that they were the only ones moving as the band promptly struck up another waltz, the students too stunned to see their Transfiguration and Defence Against the Dark Arts professors dancing together, and the adults not wanting to get in the way. When the band stopped playing, Orion and Professor McGonagall left the floor to a round of cheers and applause which caused Professor McGonagall to blush slightly. Orion ignored the noise and turned to her.

"Thank you for the dance, Professor," he said formally.

"It was my pleasure, Professor, you dance very well," Professor McGonagall replied. The staff were amused that Orion still had difficulty addressing them by their names, although when he explained that many of them had been his teachers in the future they understood. It didn't decrease the amusement, if anything; their amusement increased as they innocently inquired about his study habits and made jokes about school looking quite different from the teacher's side of the desk. Orion bore the jokes as well as he could, knowing that his colleagues were trying to make him feel welcome. He was trying to shed the formality but it was slow going, given that Professor McGonagall in particular could still make him feel like a student.

Returning to Laura, he put his arm around her shoulders, pleased when she leaned into his embrace. He didn't know whether it was going anywhere, or even if he should be pursuing her, given that they were work colleagues. She didn't seem to care about that little fact though and with that in mind, he decided to just see what happened.

Catching Severus' narrowed eyes; he frowned slightly, wondering what had upset him now. He followed his son's gaze to Lily, who was currently dancing with James. He shook his head slightly, it would appear that Severus' feelings for his childhood friend were deeper than he was willing to admit, and the jealousy surrounding her friendship with James was also deepening, rather than dissipating as Orion had hoped.

"Let them work it out themselves, Harry," Lily said in his mind.

Orion smiled, his mother could always be relied on for good advice. "I'm going to, but I don't want to find myself breaking up another fight like the previous one," he murmured mentally.

"Fights might be inevitable, Harry," the older version of Severus cut in. "Both James' younger self and mine feel strongly about Lily, and they're going to clash and keep clashing until she chooses one of them as her boyfriend."

"They're both too young to be thinking about that though," Orion replied in frustration.

"They're almost fourteen, in another year or so they won't be too young," Severus said calmly. "I agree that the sort of fight you broke up a few days ago should be discouraged, but you can't expect them to immediately act on what you said to them. They're thirteen-year-old boys, they will need time to come to terms with their feelings and work out a way that all of them can be friends without their feelings interfering too much."

"Was the animosity between you and Dad a result of a similar situation?" Orion asked.

Severus was silent, and it was James who eventually answered. "No. Severus and Lily were friends through school, at least, up until the

end of fifth year. He loved her, we know that now, but I didn't start really trying to court her until our sixth year, after my parents died."

"Did you not tell her how you felt?" Orion enquired of Severus. His tone was hesitant; he knew how personal a question it was.

"No. I was a Slytherin, she was a Gryffindor. I thought any attempt would be rebuffed because of that and so I never tried, which I always regretted," Severus answered after a few moments.

Orion was silent for several minutes and then he said, "So, I should keep an eye on the situation, but not interfere unless they come to blows again?"

"Precisely," James and Severus answered in unison.

Orion's mouth tightened briefly, unhappy with the notion that he couldn't directly interfere, even though he knew he shouldn't anyway. Adolescent rivalries like this were a normal part of school life; he would not be doing Severus any favors if he tried to shield him from them, nor James either.

"Don't forget me," Remus murmured, and Orion swung his gaze to see that his other son had claimed Lily once again and was dancing with her, seeming perfectly happy to hold her and not let her go.

"Hmm. This could be interesting, all three of them interested in Lily," he murmured. His spirit family agreed, and Orion led Laura to the dance floor once more, for the last dance of the evening. Thoughts of the simmering rivalry between James and Severus over Lily's friendship, and the possible addition of Remus to that equation dissolved as he enjoyed holding his own possible girlfriend close to him as the last notes of the song washed over them.

The first week of school saw Remus, Sirius, James, and Severus reporting to Orion's classroom after dinner for the first night of their

detention. Orion didn't say much to them, beyond pointing out the work he wanted them to do – cataloguing DADA artifacts that he'd acquired for the senior classes. The boys got to work with no grumbles at all, they'd been hoping for a last-minute reprieve, but though none had come, they didn't want to extend their punishment by grumbling about it.

Orion watched them work out of the corner of his eye as he graded essays. He saw the fine chains round each of their necks and he smiled – they were wearing the main Christmas present he'd given them. Each Marauder, along with Lily, Charles, Emma, Rose, and Daniel had received a pendant which was a Portkey to the Chamber of Secrets, which Orion had cleaned up and remodeled into a secret headquarters, complete with bedrooms, a strategy room, a toilet and shower, and even a small kitchen. Magic was a truly wonderful thing. As part of the protections on the chamber, Orion had put up strong wards designed to keep out everyone who wasn't keyed into the wards. The portkeys he'd given his family and Sirius were keyed into the wards, and Orion himself, as the creator, was automatically keyed in.

The remodeled Chamber of Secrets would serve as both a secret headquarters for Orion to work on his Unspeakable duties while at Hogwarts and a safe-house for his family if they were attacked. Orion had learnt his lesson from the future – the portkeys that the Marauders and the rest of his family were wearing would punch through any anti-portkey wards, regardless of who had raised them. The emergency portkey in the future hadn't had enough power to get through the anti-portkey wards that Ron had raised, thus contributing to the death of his family. Orion would be damned if he let that happen again.

Finishing the grading, Orion checked the time and seeing that time was almost up, he called a halt to the detention. "Time's up guys, you're free to go for tonight. Don't forget to return tomorrow." At their rather hangdog expressions, he relented. "You've done a really good

job here; I think you might be able to finish this task tomorrow. Oh, and be at breakfast, you'll enjoy it."

The Marauders looked at each other, puzzled, before shrugging and bidding Orion goodnight. They left shortly afterwards, not seeing the small smile playing at the corners of Orion's mouth. The next morning would indeed be amusing.

The quartet were in their seats at breakfast along with the other students and the Triwizard champions. The second task would be announced that morning, and everyone, especially the champions, was eager to know what it would be. When Dumbledore finally entered the hall, a stunned silence fell.

James, Sirius, Remus, and Severus looked at Orion in shock and awe. Dumbledore looked as though his body had been replaced with a gigantic lemon drop, with his arms, legs, and head attached to it. The best thing was, to him, he looked perfectly normal.

A small snort of laughter was heard from the Slytherin table, before spreading to the Hufflepuffs, and then the Ravenclaws. The Gryffindors were the last to catch the hilarity bug but when they did, the noise was astounding. Students were falling off their seats laughing, and the champions were eyeing Dumbledore with amusement.

"I wonder who did that," Abraxas murmured to Orion, who smirked at him, his eyes betraying a small glimmer of amusement.

"I hear there are a group of pranksters known as the Marauders who like this sort of thing," he said blandly.

"True, but this would be too advanced for students, and they couldn't get into the headmaster's quarters anyway," Abraxas replied, his tone equally bland.

Orion eyed him briefly before shaking his head. "You have a point. Who do you think did this?"

"A person here with a grudge against our esteemed Headmaster," Abraxas drawled. "Someone like yourself perhaps."

Orion shrugged. "Maybe, but what if I have an alibi." He winced as a hard poke to his arm distracted him and he turned to see Professor McGonagall looking at him, her eyes hard as steel.

"Orion, may I have a word after breakfast," she said sternly.

"Of course, Minerva," he said, trying to shake the feeling that he'd been caught.

"Too late, Harry, she's onto you," a voice sing-songed in his mind.

"Shut up, Sirius," Orion growled back, although acknowledging ruefully that his godfather could be right.

"I am right and you know it," Sirius retorted.

"I can't talk now," Orion snapped back. Sirius thankfully quieted, and Orion resumed his interrupted breakfast, having zoned out a bit while mentally conversing with his godfather. He heard a chuckle and shook his head, knowing that his spirit family were having a good laugh at the situation, but unable to do much about it.

As breakfast ended, the Triwizard organizers stood up and waited for silence. When the hall eventually quieted down, the chief organizer cleared his throat. "As you all know, the second task is coming up in February. The first was a test of their ability to think creatively while on the move. The second will be a test of their mental and emotional strength. They will have to face their worst fear and the one who lasts the longest wins the task. The champions will have to face their fear armed only with their minds; they will not be allowed their wands. To

our champions, good luck, to the rest of you, have a good day."

The organizers sat down and the noise level in the room rose again as everyone speculated on what the task could be. The champions sat in grim silence, the only way they could face their worst fear would be by being exposed to Dementors. Without their wands, it would truly be a test of mental and emotional strength. Orion shut his eyes, he would definitely need the weeks in between now and then to prepare. He had a lot of bad memories which could potentially weaken his chances of winning. He was second in line; he couldn't afford to slip further down the list if he wanted any chance of winning.

The next week, the second of Severus and James' detention, the two boys showed up in Orion's office as usual. Remus and Sirius had served their one week and were glad to be finished, although they commiserated with their friends over their remaining two weeks. They had borne the detentions well, although Severus was wondering if his father had remembered that it was his birthday that day. Orion hadn't said anything to him beyond wishing him a happy birthday, and hadn't given him a gift that morning as he usually did on his birthday.

When they finally arrived at his office, Orion looked up with a smile. "Detention is canceled tonight," he said and fought back a laugh at the stunned looks on his son's and nephew's faces. "Did you think I'd forgotten your birthday?" he teased, giving Severus a hug.

"Well, you said happy birthday this morning but you didn't give me anything," Severus admitted, sitting down in a chair and trying to process the fact that his birthday hadn't been forgotten after all.

"I wanted to give you your gift in private, I knew Remus, James, and Sirius had already given you their presents," Orion said. "If I'd realized that it would upset you this much I'd have found a way to give you it before." He held out a square shaped present, wrapped in green paper with a silver ribbon.

"Thanks, Dad," Severus said, taking the present and opening it eagerly. He opened it and then looked up at Orion with a shocked expression. It was a box with green velvet padding inside, and nestled in the padding, in spaces specifically made for them, was potions vials. All the vials were full, and the ingredients were expensive and rare, ones that potions masters had to order months in advance if they wanted to use them.

"Dad, how did you get these?" Severus asked, picking up one of the vials and reading the label through blurry eyes. The handwriting was unmistakably his father's, and Severus had to blink a few times before the words became clear again.

Basilisk venom

He picked up the other vials, reading the labels with ever increasing respect and awe.

Basilisk scales

Phoenix tears

Unicorn hair

Giant blood

Boomslang skin

Runespoor eggs

There were others, but those were the most important ingredients. Severus looked up at his father, and then abruptly stood up, rounding the table and hugging Orion hard, saying thank you over and over again. Orion hugged him back, barely able to get a word in.

"I take it you're pleased then?" he asked with a raised eyebrow.

Severus gave him his "I think you're an idiot" look and said, "Yes, of course I am. These are really rare, how did you get them?"

"There's a basilisk down in the Chamber of Secrets who donated the venom and scales, she also donated her last skin that she shed, which I'm not sure what to do with yet, the unicorns in the Forbidden Forest allowed me to comb their tails once I showed them I meant no harm, Fawkes donated the tears, and I have acquired a boomslang and a runespoor, both of whom donated those ingredients in your kit. Use them sparingly for a while, I can get more but for now, use them wisely.

"OK, Dad. This is still really cool though," Severus said eagerly.

"I know, that's why I got them for you," Orion teased. "Sit down, I know I said detention was over, and it is, but I want to discuss the second task."

"It's not going to affect us though, is it?" James spoke up.

"It might," Orion said, his eyes hardening for a moment. "The only way for the champions to face their worst fears would be to expose us to Dementors, and if they bring Dementors here, they will no doubt affect the spectators in some way as well. It is for that reason that I want you to double your Occlumency practice. Is Sirius learning it as well?"

"Yes, he got his father to teach it to him," Severus replied after a minute. "Will you teach us Legilimency too?"

"Not just yet, your Occlumency shields aren't quite advanced enough for that," Orion responded. Noticing the downcast looks he said, "Legilimency is advanced mind magic, and while Occlumency is safe enough to teach to students, the temptation to look into other

people's minds might prove too great for you."

"You think we'd read people's minds deliberately?" Severus sounded hurt at the accusation.

"What happened when your talent first awoke?" Orion responded with a raised eyebrow, and Severus blushed.

"Point taken," he muttered. He had used his newly-awakened Legilimency talent to read people's thoughts when it had first appeared, although after almost two years of Occlumency training, he felt he had a good enough handle on it to prevent that happening.

"Why do we need to practice Occlumency? How is it going to help against Dementors?" James enquired.

"If you have a clear mind, you can fight the effects of the Dementors better, because you can fight the memories and push them back where they should be," Orion said. "They will bring up all your worst memories, everything. They are the very worst of all magical creatures, and I can't believe that the organizers would bring them into a school of all places."

"What about the Kiss?" Severus asked, his face going white as he imagined all sorts of horrible possibilities.

"The organizers won't allow that," Orion said firmly. "They want us to face our fears, not end up soulless shells. The task is supposed to be challenging, but not lethal."

"That's what they said about the last one," James muttered.

"Yes, well," Orion trailed off, not sure how to answer that one.

"Is there a way to keep them away from us?" Severus queried.

"Yes, but it's advanced magic, and if I teach you, then I'll teach Remus and Sirius as well," Orion replied with a frown. "It's called the Patronus charm, and it's a charm that many adult witches and wizards have trouble with. Do you still want to try?"

James and Severus looked at each other, and then said, "Yes."

Orion nodded. "Very well. Tell Remus and Sirius about the charm, and if they want to learn it too, bring them along tomorrow evening. We'll turn the rest of your detention into Patronus lessons, and I'll introduce it in class as well." He looked at the time and shook his head. "I'll escort you back to your dormitories; it's too late to be wandering the corridors at this time."

He was as good as his word, seeing both James and Severus safely to the Gryffindor and Slytherin common rooms. At the Gryffindor common room, he had a quick word with Remus and Sirius, both of whom told him that yes; they'd like to learn the Patronus charm as well. With that sorted, he led Severus down to the Slytherin common room, stopping outside the door to chat with the portrait of Salazar Slytherin, who was always happy to chat with his descendants.

Severus chuckled as he heard his house founder describe Voldemort as a power-hungry tyrant with delusions of grandeur. "Go inside, Sev, I need to talk with Salazar a bit more," Orion said, giving his son a brief hug to soften the brusque tone of voice he'd used. Sev looked at Salazar longingly, wanting to remain to hear the rest of the conversation, but the Founder looked sternly at him.

"Do as he says, young snake," he said, and Severus had no choice but to obey. As the portrait closed behind him, Salazar chuckled. "You have a fine heir," he said to Orion, who nodded.

"I do, and my other son is equally as good. I feel lucky to have them," he said with a smile. Salazar shook his head.

"Tell me more about Riddle. You mentioned in our last conversation, a predicament you have with him."

Orion shrugged. "I've almost destroyed all of his hidden treasures. I'm going after one of them tomorrow in fact. I don't know what to do about our connection though. I don't want to die, I want to see my children grow up and have their own children. The problem is that once I've destroyed all Riddle's hidden treasures, there's nothing stopping me from killing him."

"And yet, killing him will mean your own death unless you can break this connection," Salazar said with a shrewd look in his dark eyes.

Orion nodded shortly. "Yes. I don't know of anything that can break a soul connection other than death though. Unless you know of something, that is."

"Not offhand. Keep researching though. Something will come up."

Orion nodded and turned away. He turned back as Salazar said, "Oh, Orion?" His eyes met those of his ancestor's and he smiled as Salazar hissed, Good luck.

Thank you Orion hissed back before walking away. He needed to prepare for the second to last Horcrux Hunt.

The next evening, the Marauders reported to Professor McGonagall's office for their detention/Patronus lesson. Orion had told them at breakfast that he was unavailable that night but that they were to read the assigned material on the Patronus charm, and he would give them the first practical lesson the next night. Although wondering where Orion was, they obediently read through the material, and began to rethink whether they could learn the spell. It sounded more difficult than they'd expected.

Orion himself was crouched outside Voldemort's hideout. The cup

was supposed to be in there. Looking around, Orion saw his team crouching behind him. He cursed Voldemort's intelligence – moving the cup to where it would be best protected from enemies was a smart thing to do, but it made it harder for Orion to get to it.

"OK everyone, this is it. We know what's in there, we know what we came to get, so let's do it," Orion whispered. His team fanned out behind him as they transformed. The small wolf pack spread out and started howling. Orion was the only one who didn't transform – he was counting on his team to bring out the Death Eaters inside, and right on cue, they arrived.

Orion grabbed the first Death Eater who stepped foot outside the house, breaking his neck with one quick, efficient movement. Dropping the dead body, Orion slid behind the Death Eaters, who had now all come out of the house, and started killing them silently. The Death Eaters didn't realize that anyone was behind them because they were busy trying to curse the wolves, who stayed just out of reach. Occasionally one would dart in, snap at a Death Eater, and dart away again. This gave Orion the opportunity he needed to kill the Death Eaters without them knowing what was happening.

Orion signaled the wolves when he'd killed the last one – there were only six of them, which Orion thought was a bit odd – he'd expected Voldemort to have more guards.

'What am I thinking, Voldemort needing guards', Orion thought to himself, disgusted. The Dark Lord didn't need guards, he was too certain of his own superiority for that. The Death Eaters he'd killed would have been receiving orders for a raid or something like that.

"Move in, Boss?" Reaper whispered behind him.

Orion looked at him, spotting the new member of his team, a recruit who had a wolf animagus form the same as the others, just behind Reaper. The expression on the recruit's face made him uneasy. He

hadn't liked the fact that the recruit had been forced on him, as a replacement for Shade, who had been killed in a battle where the Wolves had been providing backup for the Aurors while they fought Death Eaters. Orion still wasn't sure whether his teammate had been killed by Death Eaters or by friendly fire – there had been so many Killing Curses thrown that night that it could have been anyone. He and the other Wolves had resisted having a new person added to their team for several months, preferring to close ranks and grieve for their lost friend first.

From the first, the Wolves resented the new inclusion. His attitude set all their teeth on edge, and Orion found himself seriously contemplating throwing a few Cruciatus curses at him. He was too arrogant, too sure of himself, and didn't want to obey orders, even in the training room where missions were simulated to give teams practice before taking on the real thing. Orion hadn't wanted him on this mission, but he'd been overruled by Croaker, who ordered him to take the recruit along, to give him some proper field experience.

"Move in now," he ordered. Catching the recruit's eye, he hissed, "Gryffin – stay with me."

The Unspeakables quickly and silently entered the manor, checking for any hidden traps along the way. Finding none, they proceeded further inside, checking and double -checking the floor for loose floorboards before taking a step.

They gathered just outside the door to what they knew was the sitting room. They'd studied plans of the house before they'd known that it was Voldemort's home, so they knew where they had to go.

Orion took a breath, and slowly let his shields down, seeking Voldemort's presence. He knew Voldemort's magical signature well, and he didn't sense it within the room. He checked again – it was possible for someone to mask their presence but there were always telltale signs.

He felt Gryffin trembling beside him and turned his head to glare at him. "Keep still," he whispered harshly. "We need to be sure we're alone before moving in." He stilled, catching one of the telltale traces and grasped Gryffin's shoulder. "Wait, someone's in there," he hissed. He probed more urgently, and went rigid. "Pull out," he whispered, drawing back from the room.

"What's wrong?" Reaper whispered.

"Snake Face is at home," Orion whispered back, still drawing back, his team backing up behind him.

"Boss, look," Kestrel hissed, pointing at the door.

Orion looked and stiffened. Gryffin was still outside the door and hadn't fallen back with them when he'd ordered it. Growling under his breath, Orion moved back towards the recruit and snarled in his ear.

"Fall back now, Gryffin. That's an order! It's too dangerous to go in right now."

Gryffin shook his head. "No, I'm going in now," he said and he charged into the room, wand out. A forceful "Avada Kedavra!" was heard but Gryffin's yell of pain told them that the curse had missed.

Swearing under their breath, the rest of the Wolves rushed in, Orion in the lead, to see Gryffin dueling with Voldemort, who had the look of a cat which was toying with a mouse prior to eating it. Voldemort looked up as they entered, and his eyes fixed on Orion, the fierce glare in their green depths similar to the glare in Orion's.

"You!" Voldemort hissed. Orion said nothing, his gaze focused on the Dark Lord. The original plan was for the Wolves to get in, grab the cup, and get out again, without attracting attention. With that plan utterly destroyed, the only choice left was to grab the cup and get out

with as few injuries as possible.

Kestrel spotted the cup and headed towards it, having to skirt round the dueling trio of wizards in the centre of the room. Orion had joined Gryffin, who hadn't seemed to realize how hopelessly outclassed he was yet, and between them, they were keeping the Dark Lord busy.

Voldemort shot a Killing Curse at Gryffin who saw Kestrel passing by him. He grabbed her, throwing her in front of him and using her as a shield. The deadly curse hit her and she slumped in his arms.

The other Wolves let out savage growls at the sight of Gryffin's cowardly act and would have transformed and rushed at him if Orion hadn't issued several orders in quick succession. Diamond grabbed the cup as he was closest, and then took a Portkey back to the Department of Mysteries. Kestrel and Reaper grabbed Gryffin and followed Diamond while Orion continued dueling Voldemort, to provide cover for them.

"Exsanguino!" Voldemort hissed.

Orion jerked out of the way of the curse and threw a Sectumsempra curse back. Voldemort twisted out of the way and threw a dark curse back, which Orion wasn't fast enough to dodge.

"SSSSSSssssssss" Orion hissed as he fell to the ground, his wand falling out of his hand and rolling across the floor. The hiss was the only indication of pain he would allow himself to express in front of his enemy. He felt as though he was burning, and the wound itself looked as though it had been sprayed with acid.

"Not so brave now, are you, Hunter," Voldemort said menacingly, standing over Orion and prodding him with the toe of his boot. "Tell me, have you met Orion Potter?"

Orion choked on a laugh. Voldemort hadn't made the connection

between him and the Heir of Slytherin yet, he thought that Hunter was the Heir of Slytherin. "Yes," he managed to say.

"Are you friends?" the Dark Lord enquired.

Orion coughed, noting with alarm that it hurt to breathe, and rasped, "Why do you want to know?" He tried to summon his wand to him with wandless magic but Voldemort stopped him by kicking him in the ribs, breaking his concentration.

"Because," Voldemort said in a tone that, had he been anyone else, might have been called friendly, "I'm going to send him your tortured, broken body in pieces. I'm sure his children will appreciate it too."

As Orion tried his best to reach the portkey round his neck, Voldemort reached down and pushed his head back so that their eyes met. "When you are dead," he growled, "I will be the Heir of Slytherin, and no one will be able to take that title from me again."

Orion coughed, feeling another sharp burst of pain in his chest. 'Cracked rib' he thought absently. "I hate to burst your bubble," he said, "but someone will always challenge you for it. You will never be the Heir of Slytherin. All you will ever be, at best, is a delusional, power-hungry tyrant who has a distant connection with Slytherin."

Voldemort's expression grew distinctly ugly and he aimed his wand at Orion, casting a Cruciatus. As Orion writhed on the floor in agony, he was dimly aware of the Dark Lord picking up his wand and pocketing it.

"Enjoy your stay," Voldemort said with a thin smile as he flicked his wand in Orion's direction. As he slid into unconsciousness, Orion sent out a mental message to Severus and Remus.

Sev, Remy, I'm sorry.

Far away in Hogwarts, Severus and Remus suddenly stiffened. Still in Professor McGonagall's office, they turned to each other and said with wide, frightened eyes, "Dad!"

Author Note

Hi everyone. I thought it was time for another update so here it is. I've been working on getting a job recently which is why updates have been slow, but I think I have a good chance at getting a job soon so I should have more time to write. I have changed chapter two of the story which is why there's an alert for that chapter – the battle's been changed to more accurately reflect what I was trying to write the first time. I've changed a little bit of chapter twenty-four as well so that will be updated too.

May the Force be with you and thanks for all the lovely reviews

Padawan Lynne

Chapter Thirty-Three: A Slytherin Solution and Family Issues

Voldemort growled as he returned to the main sitting room in his home. The source of his frustration was chained to the wall in the basement below his feet. Unspeakable Hunter, the Heir of Slytherin, had so far refused to break under torture and that was not to be tolerated. Even under the Cruciatus, the gold-eyed Heir had remained defiant, going as far as to spit a mouthful of blood on Voldemort's robes before falling unconscious. Hissing to himself, the Dark Lord destroyed a couple of chairs before falling into the only remaining one and glaring at the fire. The sole consolation was that his stubborn prisoner displayed an impressive tolerance for the Cruciatus curse. Any other wizard would have been driven insane by now but if Hunter was losing his sanity, Voldemort couldn't see any signs of it so far.

In the basement, Orion was having a bad time. He knew he'd been Voldemort's "guest" for a week, and he had used that week to gauge his host's movements and moods. Voldemort seemed to be perpetually in a bad mood, cursing at least one Death Eater at every meeting, of which there had been three. Usually he cursed at least three per meeting, and Orion took a grim satisfaction in that as it meant that he was cursed less when Voldemort came down to question him, as he had each day since Orion had been captured.

Stretching out his arms and legs, Orion slowly drew in a deep breath, wincing as broken ribs protested the movement. One of his eyes was swollen shut and he'd lost several teeth. The Dark curse he'd fallen to in the original battle was still troubling him, the wound had not healed, despite all his best efforts, and the pain was worsening by the day. The resident Dark Arts expert in his mind could offer little help given that the curse had been cast in Parseltongue and Orion couldn't remember the incantation, no matter how hard he tried.

"Harry? Are you alright?" James was worried about him, he hated

being unable to help his son when he needed it. The other members of the spirit family agreed with him, they hated being so helpless in the face of what their son/godson/nephew was enduring.

"Do I look alright to you?" Orion snapped back, grateful that conversing mentally didn't require him to move any muscles.

"Don't speak to your father like that," Lily automatically scolded him, and Orion rolled his eyes in affectionate exasperation. Only his mother would scold him for something like that while he was a prisoner of the worst Dark Lord in history.

"Yes Mum," he shot back, allowing his mental tone to convey what he was feeling. Lily smiled ruefully and shook her head.

"We're worried about you," she said. "I take it you're working on an escape plan."

Orion nodded. "Yes. I needed this week to work out what the Death Eaters and Voldemort do on meeting nights."

"You're going to escape on a night when there are hundreds of Death Eaters and Voldemort in the same place!" James and Lily yelled in unison, causing Orion to wince as his head throbbed in pain.

"Ouch, could you keep the noise down?" he asked. He winced again as he got the mental equivalent of five hard smacks to the back of his head. He groaned as the back of his skull now hurt more than the rest of his body, which was something he hadn't believed possible.

"Tell us why you think it's a good idea to try and escape when you'll have more enemies around you rather than less," Severus demanded, his mental voice sharp and derisive.

Orion scowled. "Because," he hissed, drawing a painful breath in and then letting it out as slowly as possible, "the merry morons like to play

with me. I've worked out a way of convincing Voldemort to let one of them "play" with me alone. I'll knock the moron out, dress up as him, transfigure him into me and then kill him. You know as well as I do that when a living thing which has been transfigured into another form dies, if it is still in its transfigured state the transfiguration holds. He'll think that Hunter is dead, and I can say that my heart gave out. I'll get a round or two of Cruciatus but Voldemort's been torturing me enough that he'll buy the story."

"You hope," Remus said dryly. "He could just as easily kill you for depriving him of his favorite toy."

Orion gritted his teeth. "Voldemort is surprised I've lasted this long as it is. It's the only plan I've got, short of transforming into Salazar. That might even the odds a bit but all it would take is one transfigured rooster to kill me."

"True. Of course, if this insane scheme doesn't work, we reserve the right to say we told you so," Sirius chimed in.

James snorted, before adding, "Of course, if it does work, you'll have to face my father. He won't approve of you being captured at all, and you don't want to find out what sort of punishments he could give you if he was so inclined."

"What do you mean?" Orion asked.

James sighed. "The head of a magical family has a certain amount of authority over all members of his family, even the adult members, simply by virtue of his position. The harshest punishment that can be given is expulsion from the family, total disownment of that family member."

"Of course, there are levels to that punishment, you can be disowned or, in the case of an heir, disinherited, but still be able to be reinstated later if the head of the family decides to reverse his decision," Sirius

put in helpfully. "Taking you as an example, the worst level would be the one which not only strips you of the right to call yourself a Potter, it also makes you invisible to any member of the Potter family. You could be standing right in front of them stark naked and they wouldn't see you. Other people could, but any Potter wouldn't be able to.

Orion went very quiet, and James said, "I don't think Dad will go that far, Harry. That level is only used when the family member in question has done something like multiple rapes, or multiple murders. To my knowledge, the last time a Potter family patriarch disowned a member of his family was back in the sixteen hundreds and the member in question had killed a priest because the priest saw him use magic. Our relative also objected to the priest's attempt to exorcise whatever demon was in him, which was part of why the priest ended up dead. In your case though, Dad will certainly be annoyed, but that's only because he loves you. He probably won't punish you at all; I was just trying to get the seriousness of the situation across to you. I thought that you might not know the sort of power he holds over you simply because he's the head of our family."

Orion rolled his eyes. "I do know, Dad, but thank you for the reminder." He trailed off as an insane idea occurred to him. "I think I'll just modify my original escape plan, that conversation gave me an idea," he said, and firmly ignored all attempts from his family to get him to tell them what it was. The next Death Eater meeting was scheduled for that night and he had to be ready if his plan was to work the way he wanted it to. Closing his eyes he allowed his exhausted body to fall into a restless sleep.

He was rudely awoken as a boot crashed into his already broken ribs. Scowling, he realized that it was Voldemort standing above him, and the Dark Lord didn't look pleased. "You have been selected as the prime entertainment at the meeting tonight," he said sourly. "You're obviously not going to give me the information I want so you will die. Know this though, your friend, Orion Potter, will be found, and killed,

along with the rest of the Potter family. The line of Gryffindor will end very soon, as the Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw lines have, leaving only Slytherin with a living descendant, which will, of course, be me."

Orion knew his chance of escaping would disappear if he was the focus of a Death Eater revel. Ignoring the pleas from his family for him to think rationally, he focused on Salazar, which was what he'd named his Basilisk form, and transformed.

Voldemort staggered backwards as the Basilisk's head smashed into his chin on its way up. The Dark Lord didn't look up; knowing that to meet the gaze of the enraged King of Snakes was suicide, even if it was just his enemy's Animagus form.

Thinking quickly, he conjured a rooster even as he jumped backwards to avoid the large snake's attempt to bite him. The rooster opened its beak and was promptly crushed by the basilisk's tail. As Voldemort conjured another rooster, the basilisk transformed back into Orion.

"I'll take that, thank you very much," Orion growled, snatching Voldemort's wand out of his hand. Suddenly disarmed, Voldemort backed up. He was a formidable wizard, but like ninety-nine percent of the Wizarding World, he needed his wand to work magic. He had never learnt wandless magic so he was currently left with no option but to escape.

As he abandoned dignity and ran for the door, Orion threw several spells past him, thanking Merlin that part of his Unspeakable training was learning to cast spells while only being able to see with one eye. It made casting spells in his current one-eyed condition much easier. Orion's intention was to capture Voldemort. He couldn't kill him, not yet, not till he'd destroyed the diary horcrux. Until then though, he could keep him from causing more trouble.

Voldemort snarled in frustration as he reached the door and found

that it was sealed shut. Turning to face his opponent, his eyes narrowed. He was Lord Voldemort, he couldn't die. His horcruxes would ensure that he survived.

"I can't die you know," he said with a sneer.

Orion looked unimpressed. "For now," he said. "I wasn't intending on killing you yet anyway. I've got a much better idea."

Despite himself, Voldemort started to feel nervous. His enemy, the Heir of Slytherin, his very distant cousin, was showing no fear at all, and he was standing upright, in spite of the fact that with the injuries he'd sustained over the previous week it shouldn't have been possible.

"What do you plan to do then?" he enquired. "You do know that my Death Eaters are just outside the door, waiting for me to bring you out. You won't be able to escape."

"We'll see," Orion responded, before hissing in Parseltongue, "Tom Marvolo Riddle, you have disgraced the name of Slytherin. As Lord Slytherin, and Head of the Slytherin line, I hereby disown you and cut off any and all ties to you. You will no longer be acknowledged as a descendant of Salazar Slytherin, and any and all bloodline gifts will be revoked. You will keep your magic but it will be bound so you cannot use it. From now on, you will be unable to use your magic, and will be reduced to the status of a Squib."

Switching back to English, Orion smiled wolfishly as he watched the magic of the Slytherin line take hold of Voldemort and carry out his wishes. The Dark Lord screamed in pain as he felt magic snake through his veins, ensnaring his own magic and binding it, even as he felt his Slytherin gifts fading away. Finally the ordeal was over, and Voldemort was now facing an opponent who had his full power, while Voldemort couldn't use his magic no matter how hard he tried.

"What are you going to do?" he asked, proud of the fact that his voice didn't quiver with the fear and outrage that he was feeling.

Orion shrugged. "This," he said, before flicking Voldemort's wand at its former owner, and watched as his opponent shrank to the size of a small action figure. He picked up the screaming miniature Dark Lord and shook his head.

"Your language is deplorable," he said as he dropped Voldemort into a potions vial, having adopted the habit of carrying around spare potions vials from Severus, who had told his father sternly that potions vials were good for more than just ingredients. Orion had to agree, the small vials were also good for evidence collection at crime scenes, and now, apparently, as temporary homes for very small Dark Lords. Ensuring that his captive could breathe, he cast several charms on the vial, making it unbreakable and invisible before tucking it into the pocket of his torn, bloody robes. Hearing the muffled screams from inside his robes, he rolled his eyes and cast a silencing spell on the vial as well, abruptly cutting off the noise.

He looked up at the sound of a polite knock on the door. Thinking quickly, he grinned and cast several more spells, altering his appearance until he looked exactly like Voldemort. Opening the door, he scowled at the Death Eaters who were massed on the other side. "There has been a change of plans," he announced smoothly as he closed the door and locked it with a spell, casting it in Parseltongue so none of the Death Eaters could open it and discover that there was no one inside. He walked through the throng of wizards as they parted to make way for him, drawing on his magic to help keep him upright. Sitting in Voldemort's throne, he snapped at one of the lower level Death Eaters, asking him to bring several pain-relief potions and a pepper-up potion. Opening each one, he sniffed it, making sure it was what it should be, and then drank all of them. He silently conjured bandages under his robes, making sure his ribs were at least wrapped tightly. Too much movement, especially now after an animagus transformation, could be disastrous. He didn't think that his

broken ribs were threatening a lung or any other vital organs but it didn't hurt to be careful.

"My lord," one of the senior Death Eaters, who Orion recognized as the father of one of Severus and Remus' classmates, "what change of plans has been made?"

Orion frowned. "My favorite toy," he said with a scowl, "is too ill to play tonight. I want him to last a while when I let you have him, it wouldn't do for him to die too soon. He is currently being treated for his major wounds, and will be available soon. Is there anything that any of you have to report?"

No information was forthcoming, so Orion dismissed them and once they'd gone, he created a Portkey to take him home to Potter Manor. Looking around, he cast a couple of spells so that the Aurors could find this latest Dark Side headquarters, and then he activated the Portkey, vanishing a second later.

He landed on the carpet of the living room in Potter Manor, and, coincidentally, right at his grandfather's feet. Charles Potter had been sitting in the living room trying to comfort his wife who was certain that their grandson was dead. No one could survive more than a week as Voldemort's prisoner and it had been exactly a week since he'd been captured. They looked up at a flash of light, and gasped in shock as the person they thought was dead appeared in front of them, alive.

Charles acted without rational thought. Reaching down, he pulled Orion to his feet and shook him. "HOW DARE YOU SCARE US LIKE THAT!" he yelled, only distantly aware that Orion had stiffened and was trembling slightly. He lost his grip on his grandson as Orion transformed into Shadow and jumped behind the couch, only his nose poking out from behind the furniture.

Calming down now that the initial burst of relief-fuelled anger was out

of his system, Charles realized how his actions had affected Orion and he sunk down onto the couch and groaned.

"Orion, I'm sorry," he said, turning round and looking over the back of the couch. Shadow looked back at him, his eyes conveying his hurt and bewilderment at Charles' actions. Orion hadn't expected to be greeted with open arms, he knew he'd get a reprimand at the very least, but he hadn't expected his grandfather to shake him like he had. He knew logically that Charles wasn't Vernon Dursley, and he wouldn't hurt him, hell, the brief shake had only startled him rather than hurt him, but it was the unexpectedness of the action that was making him wary of approaching his grandfather again.

"Orion, please," Charles pleaded. "I don't know what came over me; I was so relieved that you were safe that I just acted without thinking. I'm sorry. Please, I'm not going to hurt you. You know that, don't you?"

Shadow looked at him, and then slunk out from behind the couch, coming to sit in front of Charles. He laid his head in his grandfather's lap and whined. Charles patted his head and rubbed behind his ears. "You gave us a big scare, that's why I reacted that way, but I shouldn't have. Can you forgive me?"

Shadow shivered, and then transformed into Orion. He eyed Charles for a moment before hugging him so hard that Charles thought his ribs were going to break. Noticing his grandson's shallow breathing, he frowned.

"Did you transform whilst suffering from broken bones?" he enquired.

Orion nodded. "It was instinct, I probably shouldn't have done it," he admitted as a sharp twinge of pain shot through his side. "I forgive you by the way," he added with a lopsided grin. "I was expecting some sort of reaction, just not quite the one I got."

"What were you expecting?" Emma asked from over in her chair.

Orion shrugged. "Dad was telling me all about the sort of punishments the head of a magical family can hand out to family members who do things that the head doesn't approve of. It was that conversation which gave me the idea for how I escaped."

Charles raised an eyebrow. "This should be interesting," he murmured. "I suppose he was telling you that I could disown you and things like that." Orion nodded and Charles thought for a minute before his eyes widened.

"You didn't," he breathed, staring at Orion in shock. Orion nodded, and if his smile was a tad too smug for Charles' liking, the elder Potter didn't mention it. Instead, he stared in amazement as Orion pulled the potions vial out of his pocket and handed it to him.

"Grandfather," Orion said formally, "may I present Tom Marvolo Riddle, also known as Lord Voldemort."

Charles looked at the miniature Dark Lord who was now sitting on the bottom of the vial and glaring at everything in sight. Putting the vial down, he fixed Orion with an intense look and ordered, "Explain."

Orion sighed. "I need to see Severus and Remus first. I'm sure they're even more worried about me than you were."

"What about James?" Emma enquired.

Orion looked at the floor. "Him too, yes, but if I had died, James would still have had you to rely on. Severus and Remus wouldn't have that."

"You think we'd let them go to someone else?" Charles demanded, hurt and outrage in his tone. "They're as much a part of this family as you are. If you'd died, we would have stepped in and raised them

along with James."

"Yes but it wouldn't be the same. They know you as their aunt and uncle but living with you after my death wouldn't be the same."

"They'd be comparing us with you, you mean?" Emma said softly. "We know it wouldn't be the same, but thanks to your escape, none of us will have to deal with that. James was just as worried as Severus and Remus were, and Sirius and Lily weren't far behind. They'd all like to see you."

"Really?" Orion was surprised, he'd known that James, Severus and Remus would be frantic, his sons and nephew/father were very close to him, and loved him more than he had thought possible. Their feelings were returned in full, Orion had lasted as Voldemort's prisoner because of them. He'd known that he had to survive so he could return to them. Two sets of arms wrapped round him and he felt Emma quietly crying into his shoulder as Charles wrapped his arms round both him and Emma. If a few tears escaped his grandfather's eyes as well, Orion wasn't going to say anything.

"OK, so, could you get them here then? James, Sev and Remy definitely, and if Lily and Sirius want to come too then they're welcome," Orion said after the group hug had ended.

Charles frowned. "Before we do, I'm going to insist that you see a healer. I can call a healer from St. Mungo's, or we can see if Poppy Pomfrey can come from Hogwarts. Better yet, we can all go to Hogwarts, you can get patched up for what I'm sure must be the thousandth time at least, and then we can have our meeting. The only thing I'm not sure about is the travel method."

After hearing the options, Orion grimaced and said, "I'd prefer Hogwarts, but I also need the remainder of my team as well as a couple of other colleagues from the Department of Mysteries."

"Why?" Emma said curiously.

Orion hissed in pain as her hand lightly brushed his side. "Because Voldy hit me with a Dark curse during the duel and it hasn't healed. I also can't remember the incantation."

"So you're suffering from a curse which could be killing you and you can't remember which one it was," Charles summed up with a scowl. Orion nodded rather dejectedly and then swallowed as Charles pulled his head up so that he was looking directly at his grandfather.

"I am very tempted to call your boss and tell him to put you on permanent desk duty, Harry James Potter," Charles growled. "At least then you'd be safe at work, and I'm sure I could find you lots of things to do here to keep you occupied."

"You'd ground me!" Orion squeaked indignantly, of all the punishments his father had mentioned just before his escape from Voldemort, the possibility of being grounded had never been mentioned.

"No," Charles said, fighting to keep from smiling at his grandson's outraged expression at the notion that Charles was going to ground him. "It's called house arrest, actually, and I didn't say I was going to do it, I said I was tempted to do it. I want you to be safe, and I'm tired of seeing you go from one dangerous situation to another seemingly without anyone telling you what effect it has on the people who love you."

"It's my job, and I truly didn't intend for this particular situation to happen," Orion said slowly, emphasizing the words. He couldn't quite keep a touch of anger out of his voice as he continued, "When I realized that Voldemort was home, and that it wasn't safe to get the Horcrux, I began to pull back. All of my team, except one, came with me. The one lone idiot rushed into the room and challenged Voldemort."

"So you went in to save him," Charles finished with a sigh.

"Not to save him," Orion corrected. "To provide cover fire so he could get back out. He refused to fall back though, and I had to enter the fight to help him, even though he shouldn't have been challenging Voldemort in the first place." He scowled as he remembered the rest of the disastrous operation. "Voldemort fired a killing curse at the idiot and the idiot used another member of the team as a shield."

"You mean..." Emma was horrified as Orion nodded grimly.

"I lost a good team member and friend due to one rookie's cowardice," he snarled. "More than that, although we got the Horcrux, and I'm certain it's destroyed by now, I spent a week as a practice dummy for Voldemort when I didn't have to. As soon as I'm well enough, Gryffin is going to pay for what he did."

"Why did you take a rookie along on that sort of mission?" Charles asked curiously, his annoyance over Orion's risk-taking behaviour somewhat appeased by the explanation that was being given.

"Because we had no choice," Orion growled in response. "A team has to be five in number, one leader and four followers. We'd lost Shade on an earlier mission and Gryffin was his replacement. Now we have to replace two, because Kestrel is dead, and Gryffin will either be fired by Croaker, or I will kill him. Either way, I will be training two new recruits because after this I will not have Gryffin on my team. Neither will any other Unspeakable team leader want him after hearing what he did. We can't afford that combination of impetuosity and cowardice while out on a mission. The team works as one unit, each member relying on the others to back them up, and having someone in your team who you feel you can't trust makes everything a lot harder."

"Getting back to the issue at hand," Charles said firmly, drawing

Orion's attention away from the dark spiral that his thoughts had been headed in. "You need a healer, and we'll get our visit to Hogwarts over as well. The next time we see you will be at the Second Task."

Orion went pale. "How much time do I have to prepare?" he asked.

"Two weeks," was the answer, and Orion sighed in relief. He hadn't lost too much time after all.

"OK. So, how do we go about this?" he asked.

Charles took charge, knowing that Orion was nearly at the point of total collapse. His injuries were taking a harsh toll on his physical and mental strength, and recounting the events that had led to his capture hadn't helped. Putting an arm round his grandson's shoulder's he stood, partially supporting Orion's weight as the younger wizard stumbled towards the fireplace. Emma followed behind as they Flooed to Hogwarts.

Poppy clucked and fussed over Orion like a mother hen as she fixed his various injuries. The ribs had to be vanished and re-grown with Skele-Grow due to his two Animagus transformations, and Orion had to endure a stern lecture from Professor McGonagall on the dangers of transforming into one's Animagus form while injured. Reaper and Diamond came to tell him that Kestrel's funeral was in a week, and Gryffin was in one of the Department holding areas, awaiting Orion's decision on his fate. When he'd raised an eyebrow at that declaration, Reaper had shrugged and said that Croaker felt partially responsible for the whole mess and as such was leaving Gryffin's fate up to Orion as he was Gryffin's team leader. The unspoken message – that Orion could kill the young Unspeakable if he wanted to and Croaker wouldn't stop him – was in some ways worrying, but a greater part of Orion felt nothing but satisfaction that he would be able to deal with Gryffin as he wanted to with no official repercussions afterwards.

Soon, all of Orion's injuries were healed, except for his ribs which wouldn't be fully healed until the next day, and the curse which was proving to be a puzzle, even for the Unspeakable curse breakers who had been brought in at Orion's request. They'd managed to stop the pain, and had determined that it wasn't going to kill him within the next few days. They promised to have an answer within three days and then vanished. Once they'd all gone, Orion was able to see three very impatient young wizards hovering at the door of the infirmary.

With a smile, he motioned for them to come in, and the next instant he was engulfed by three sets of arms as Severus, James and Remus all hugged him at once. Over their heads, he spotted Sirius and Lily standing uncertainly behind them and he smiled. "It's good to see you again," he said softly, letting them know that they were welcome.

"It's good to see you too, Mr Potter," Sirius replied. "James, Severus and Remus almost went insane this week, not knowing whether you were alright."

"Well, apart from a few lingering aches and pains, I'm OK," Orion said reassuringly. "Lily, how are you?"

"OK, I guess," she replied, biting her lower lip nervously. "Defence Against the Dark Arts isn't the same without you as the teacher though. Are you coming back to teach?"

"Lily!" the four boys automatically complained. "He's just recovered from being Voldemort's prisoner and you want to talk about schoolwork!"

To their surprise though, Orion chuckled. "You remind me very much of my wife," he said with a smile as Lily looked embarrassed. "She would have had schoolwork first on her mind as well. Whenever I was in the hospital wing, I could count on her to bring up a huge pile of books and homework assignments that I missed out on and she'd

help me do them. I will be returning to teach, but exactly when is up to my guardian angels over there." He jerked his head towards Charles and Poppy who were in a heated conversation over exactly when Orion could leave the hospital wing. Poppy wanted to keep him in there for the following three days, Charles wanted him to leave the next day.

"So, what happened? We were really worried," Remus said, with only the tiniest hint of accusation in his voice.

"Yeah, Dad, we thought you were going to die," Severus added, not bothering to hide the hurt and anger that he was feeling. Neither he nor Remus could face the possibility of losing their father, and the fact that his job took him into dangerous situations was something they were resenting more and more as they grew older.

"I'll tell you once I'm out of here," Orion replied. "However, I will tell you now that you won't have to worry about Voldemort for a while."

"Why not?" James was curious as to what his uncle could have done to make Voldemort not be a threat for a while.

Orion chuckled. "Charles, did you bring that item I showed you earlier?" he called.

Charles looked over at him and then grinned. "I did. Here you go." He threw the vial over to Orion, who reached out and caught it, snatching it from the air like a Snitch.

"This is why you don't have to worry about that pesky Dark Lord," he said and held out the vial to James, who took it and looked at the contents for a minute. His eyes grew as wide as saucers and he gaped at his uncle.

"Is this really...?"

"Yes, it's really him," Orion confirmed, struggling not to laugh at the shocked look on James' face.

"Wow, Mr Potter," Sirius whispered in admiration. "You shrunk the Dark Lord."

"I did a bit more than that actually, but that's a story for when I'm out of here and away from prying eyes and ears," Orion said with a grin.

"You're not going to tell us?" Severus asked.

"I am, but I meant other prying ears such as the portraits and headmaster," Orion responded, which brought grins from the kids.

"Cool," James said, a sentiment which was echoed by the others.

Charles walked over and shooed the kids away from the bed so he and Emma could sit down beside Orion. "Well, are you going to tell us how you captured the Dark Lord now?" he asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Captured the Dark Lord!" Professor McGonagall gasped, overhearing Charles' question.

Orion rolled his eyes and sighed. "Yes. James, give Voldy to her would you."

James handed the vial over to his Head of House, and McGonagall held it up to the light, scrutinizing the tiny Dark Lord intently. Finally, she put it down and fixed Orion with a piercing stare. "Tell us Mr Potter," she said, conjuring a chair and leaning forward.

Orion flicked his eyes towards the tiny Voldemort and allowed a small smirk to cross his face. "OK," he said, moving to sit up. Emma immediately helped him, fluffing the pillows up behind him and ensuring that he was fully supported and wouldn't slide back down.

Orion gave her a grateful smile and she hugged him briefly before sitting back on her chair next to Charles.

"Muffliato," Orion murmured, waving his wand and ensuring total privacy. He didn't want Dumbledore knowing what he'd done if he should happen to wander in during the tale. The old wizard might demand that Voldemort be killed immediately, and Orion didn't want to die this soon, not to mention that there was still the matter of the diary horcrux which needed to be found and destroyed. As a precaution, he also cast the same spell around the vial containing Voldemort – he didn't want the Dark Lord knowing that five of his Horcruxes were destroyed.

Looking at his eager audience, Orion launched into the story, carefully editing it so that the younger members of the audience wouldn't be too traumatized. When he got to the part where he disowned Voldemort, Charles interrupted him.

"What exactly did you say to him?"

Orion frowned and gave his grandfather the gist of what he'd said to Voldemort. Charles listened attentively and then frowned at the end. "Orion, I hate to tell you this, but you actually cast one spell with two separate parts to it. If Voldemort escapes and manages to tap into a powerful enough source of magic, he could break the binding you put on his magic. He won't be able to reverse the disownment, only you can do that, but he might be able to regain the use of his magic."

Orion scowled. "Wonderful. I take it that as long as he's our captive though that he won't be able to do that?"

Charles nodded. "Correct. As long as he remains in that vial, we're safe."

"Uncle Orion, may I ask a question?" James broke in. He reddened with embarrassment as his father frowned at him but Orion nodded

encouragingly.

"Of course, James, what do you want to know," he said.

James peered at Voldemort once again, examining the Dark Lord as one might examine an insect and then he looked at his uncle. "Er, well, why don't you just kill him now and then you won't need to worry about him ever again?"

Orion closed his eyes as he thought of how best to explain why he couldn't just squash Voldemort right then. "Voldemort isn't just a fancy name that the Dark Lord made up for himself," he began, choosing his words very carefully. "It means Flight of Death, or Flight from Death, depending on the translation, and the young Voldemort, back when he was known as Tom Riddle, began to search for a way to cheat death. He dabbled in the darkest of dark magic and split his soul into seven pieces. One piece of his soul resides in his body, and he hid the other six pieces, in various containers, around the country."

"They're what you've been searching for," Remus said in shock as understanding about his father's research project suddenly dawned on him.

Orion nodded. "Yes, that's right. My team and I have found and destroyed five of them but the sixth is eluding us. If I kill him now, he'll simply be reduced to a spirit and it's much more difficult to get rid of a spirit than it is to get rid of a person." He didn't explain the other reason he wanted to keep Voldemort alive for a while longer – he still hadn't found a way to break the bond between him and the Dark Lord, and as long as that bond existed, he had to keep his enemy alive.

"Damn, there goes our opportunity to say that our Dad killed Voldemort," Severus said with a smirk. Orion raised an eyebrow and his son elaborated – "Having the killer-of-Voldemort as our father would really be cool. You'd be famous."

Orion smiled rather sadly. "Fame isn't all it's cracked up to be," he said, "and being the son of someone famous wouldn't be as much fun as you'd think," he finished, reaching out and pulling both of his children into a hug.

"I can't promise that I won't be hurt ever again," he whispered, "but I can promise that you won't lose me to a stupid mistake. If I die, it will be because of forces outside my control, not because of my own actions."

"But your job puts you in danger every day," Remus objected, growling at the end as Moony added his own objections to his father's choice of job.

"The war puts me in danger," Orion corrected. "My job at the moment is to teach Defence Against the Dark Arts, and search for the last of Voldy's soul-containers. I took as many precautions as I could for the retrieval of that fifth container, and I was hurt because of unforeseen circumstances and one idiot's rash actions."

"Yours," Severus muttered, but not quite low enough. A slight growl told the young Slytherin that his father had heard him and wasn't pleased.

"No, actually, a young rookie decided that he would challenge Voldemort to a duel instead of following orders and falling back like I told him to," Orion said, restraining his temper with an effort. He was sore, tired, and in no mood to be insulted by his own son.

Severus' eyes had widened when he heard the growl and the explanation of the "unforeseen circumstances" which followed it had him hurriedly searching for a way to placate his father. He eyed Orion for a second and decided that the simplest way was the best.

"Sorry Dad," he murmured, forcing himself to meet his father's eyes

as he apologised. Orion looked at him for a moment and then smiled.

"Accepted," was all he said but Severus understood and breathed a sigh of relief that he'd been forgiven. If his father could shrink the Dark Lord and imprison him in a potions vial, what would he be able to do to Severus?

"Nothing," Orion murmured, and Severus looked up in shock and then anger. "Were you reading my mind?" he snapped as he hurriedly tightened the mental shields that he'd painstakingly built over the past two years with his father's help. They were still a work in progress but they were increasing in strength and complexity every time he worked on them.

Orion shook his head. "I didn't have to, you were broadcasting your thoughts quite clearly," he informed Severus, who looked shocked again, and then chagrined.

"Oh," he muttered. "Sorry," he apologised again, and once more Orion accepted it. Legilimency was a touchy subject between them at the moment, as Orion had refused to teach Severus how to use his Legilimency talent until Severus matured a bit more. Sighing, Severus accepted the fact that his father's refusal to teach him was his own fault. Not listening to the conversation which was now flowing around him, he let the memory come to him.

Flashback: Severus crept towards his father's room, wishing that he'd thought to borrow James' invisibility cloak for walking through Hogwarts. His destination was his father's suite of rooms, his mission: to find out exactly why his father was terrified of losing his family. Severus had discussed it with Remus and James, and while they agreed that it had something to do with the loss of his future family, there was something else underneath it. The young Slytherin was tired of being drip-fed little hints, and had hit on what was to him, a foolproof plan. Surely his father's shields would be weaker when he was asleep, and if they were then it would be easy for Severus to slip

through them.

Barely breathing, Severus whispered the password to the portrait and entered the living area of the suite. Creeping to his father's bedroom, he slipped inside and stood rigid, just in case Orion woke up. After a few minutes, when Orion showed no signs of waking up, Severus moved quietly to the side of the bed. Luck was with him as Orion was lying on his side, facing Severus, which made the whole mission much easier. Drawing his wand, Severus pointed it at his father and whispered, "Legilimens."

That was when things went wrong. He thought he'd succeeded, as he felt himself passing through the shields. Grinning to himself, Severus was just about to go searching for his father's secret when another set of shields rose up in front of him, and he was abruptly thrown out of Orion's mind. Gasping, he shook his head to clear the spots that were in front of his eyes and then he felt a strong hand grasp the front of his pyjamas.

"Severus Damien Potter," a voice hissed in the suddenly too-bright room, "exactly what did you think you were doing?"

Severus gulped as he looked up into his father's eyes, absently noticing the disappointment and anger that was present in them. Inwardly shivering, he thought that it was rather like looking into the eyes of an angry lion.

"Um, well, I," he began.

Orion sat up in bed and conjured a chair before firmly pushing Severus down into it. "What was the point in trying to invade my mind?" he growled. "Have I not told you before that a person's thoughts are supposed to be private? I thought you understood what I was saying. Was I wrong?"

Severus shook his head. Fighting the urge to cry – how was it that

that particular disappointed tone always made him want to do that – he answered, "No, I understood, Dad. I just wanted to know why you're so scared of losing us. James, Remus and I think that it's more than just your future family's death that's causing your fear, and I wanted to know what it was."

Orion scowled at him. "Using Legilimency like you just did is not only an invasion of privacy, it's also illegal. What caused you to think that my shields would be any less strong while I'm asleep than when I'm awake? It was a foolish idea from the start and I'm disappointed that you'd even try it. I told you as much as I could, and if I haven't told you the full story yet it's because I'm trying to protect you. If I told you the full story and you were captured by Voldemort, how long do you think you'd last before you broke under torture and told him everything?"

Severus looked down at the floor, feeling very young and stupid all of a sudden. "Lily said it would be something like that," he muttered.

A finger slid under his chin and he found himself being forced to meet his father's disappointed gaze. "You ought to listen to her then," was all Orion said but Severus found himself agreeing with his father.

"I'm sorry, Dad. I wasn't thinking of that, I just wanted to know," he said, wondering if this blunder on his part could be forgiven. He heard rustling and then he was pulled out of the chair and onto the bed. He tensed, wondering what his father was planning, and then relaxed when all that happened was that his father hugged him.

"I know that not knowing everything about me is driving you crazy," Orion murmured, resting his chin on the top of Severus' head. He tightened his arms around his son and continued, "But, doing this sort of thing, just to find out what you don't know, will only lead you into trouble. I know how frustrating it is not to be told everything about something, but if you're not told, it's not because the adults want to leave you out of the loop, it's to protect you. I know you think

you're ready to handle whatever comes with the knowledge which I'm keeping from you, but you're only thirteen. You don't know the sort of danger this particular knowledge would put you in, and I pray you never do. I will tell you when the danger has passed, I promise you that, but I want you to promise that you'll rein in that curiosity of yours and never try this sort of thing again."

Severus twisted about so he was looking up at his father once again and said, "I promise Dad, and I'm really sorry about before."

Orion smiled slightly. "I know you are. The only reason my defenses didn't attack you was because they recognized you. Had you been an intruder that my defenses didn't recognise, then your brain would have been turned to mush in a matter of seconds." Severus swallowed hard at that revelation and went pale. He obviously had a lot more to learn about Occlumency before he even attempted any Legilimency. Taking a chance, he smiled briefly at Orion and got a small smile in return.

"So, I'll just go back to bed now," he said, and moved to leave. He was stopped as an arm snaked round his middle and he was pulled back onto the bed.

"Oh no you don't. We haven't discussed your punishment yet," Orion said, biting the inside of his cheek in order to keep a stern expression on his face instead of smiling as Severus looked first shocked and then resigned. It was all too obvious that Severus had been hoping to get away with his midnight adventure but Orion had no intention of letting him get away with it at all.

"First of all," Orion said, swallowing a yawn, "you will be banned from Hogsmeade until the next school year." Severus looked outraged – next year was ages away, and there were at least three more Hogsmeade trips to come in the current year! His father wasn't finished though. "Secondly, I will not be teaching you Legilimency until I feel you're mature enough to handle the responsibility and

won't go using it for frivolous reasons, such as trying to peek into a teacher's mind for the answers to a quiz." Orion caught Severus' gaze with his own and added sternly, "How soon I begin Legilimency lessons depends on how mature your attitude towards it is. At the moment, you're not being very mature about it at all. I will still help you with Occlumency, but you won't be entering my mind until I feel that I can trust you not to go looking for things you aren't ready to know yet."

Severus just nodded in resignation. He couldn't really argue with the punishment – well, he could, but arguing carried the risk that his father might rescind Hogsmeade privileges for a lot longer, and might not ever teach him Legilimency. He suddenly felt very sleepy and couldn't suppress a wide yawn. Hearing a soft chuckle from his father, he felt the bed underneath him abruptly split in half. He was briefly airborne as Orion levitated him over to the new single bed, and then he was being tucked in. He blushed, and hoped that Orion didn't mention this to anyone – being tucked in by his father at thirteen years old! His classmates would never let him live it down! Struggling to stay awake, he mumbled,

"Dad, am I forgiven?"

There was silence for a moment and then the reply came back, "Of course, Sev, there's nothing you could do which I couldn't forgive."

Smiling at that, the teenager slipped into sleep, followed shortly afterwards by his father.

Pulling himself out of the memory, Severus realized that he and Remus were the only two students left in the hospital wing, and that Professor McGonagall had left as well. He looked over at Orion and saw that his father was watching him intently.

"Something on your mind?" Orion queried.

Severus shrugged. "Just remembering our talk about Legilimency a couple of months ago," he said.

Orion shook his head but he was smiling. "Anything in particular that you wanted to discuss?"

"No. Where did James, Sirius and Lily go?"

"To the library," Remus answered. Severus had told him and James about his failed Legilimency attempt, when he'd had to reveal that he couldn't go to Hogsmeade again until their fourth year at Hogwarts. Both James and Remus had sympathized with Severus over the harshness of the punishment, but they also thought that Severus had been lucky to get away with just the revocation of the Hogsmeade visits and no Legilimency lessons. James had shuddered and said that if he'd tried that sort of stunt with his father – well, it wouldn't have ended well.

Remus and Severus had looked at each other and then rolled their eyes. James loved to over-dramatise things; Charles had never once laid a hand on him in anger and never would, so they were quite sure that whatever the outcome would have been, it would not have involved any form of physical discipline whatsoever, no matter what James tried to insinuate.

"Why is Uncle Charles glaring at you, Dad?" Remus asked, noticing that Charles had been glaring at Orion for the past five minutes.

Orion quickly looked over at his grandfather and then turned back to his children. "He didn't like the fact that I almost died and when I got back home he threatened to ground me."

His statement had the desired effect, Remus and Severus looked between their father and their uncle in shocked disbelief before they began to laugh. "Would you really, Uncle Charles," Severus managed to choke out between giggles.

Charles looked at Orion thoughtfully. "If he doesn't start acting in a more responsible manner with regards to his own safety then I might consider it," he said, winking at the boys when Orion couldn't see him do it. This set the two young wizards off again, and Orion looked torn between amusement and annoyance. He settled on a mixture, and mock-growled, "Off with you then, I need to rest so I can get out of here tomorrow." Severus and Remus hugged him again, and then obediently left. Orion glared half-heartedly at Charles, who ignored it completely, and rolled over. Despite it being mid-morning, he really was sleepy.

Charles grinned as he watched his grandson go out like a light. Sometimes the best pranks were the ones your victim never saw coming. Standing, he pocketed the vial which had held the mild sleeping draught he'd poured into Orion's tea, and cast a spell on his sleeping grandson. When Orion woke, he'd feel an intense desire to stay in Hogwarts and not leave for the remainder of the year.

One way or another, Charles thought as he and Emma left Hogwarts, their grandson would be kept safe, even if it was against his will. Charles and Emma refused to lose Orion because of some "unforeseen circumstances." If their grandson was going to challenge Voldemort then he would not do it alone. Holding up the vial containing the miniature Dark Lord which he'd swiped from Orion's bedside table, Charles smiled grimly. It was time that certain people were reminded of the consequences of messing with the Potter family.

Chapter Thirty Four: Lord Slytherin Revealed

Orion stood at the entrance doors of Hogwarts, fuming. Magic crackled around him and his eyes were flashing from gold to green and back again as he ran through every Occlumency exercise he knew in order to calm down. He could feel the spell that his grandfather had put on him only a few days earlier and he was furious about it. How dare Charles put a playpen spell on him! The spell was used by parents to keep an eye on their children, and stop them from going beyond boundaries set by the parent, and the compulsion portion of the spell was there for the child's safety, as it was well known that young children didn't always listen to their parents when they were told not to do something. For Charles to cast it on him was beyond insulting, it was humiliating. When he next saw his grandfather, he was going to have serious words about the matter. For now though, he was going to break it and regain his freedom.

Closing his eyes, Orion found the place where the spell had connected itself to his magic and he broke the connection with one swift strike. Free of the spell, he strode out to the Apparition point. He had a funeral he needed to get to.

Reaching the graveyard, Orion stood staring down at the headstone which marked the grave of his friend. Kestrel had died doing her job but that was no consolation to her parents, both of whom blamed Orion in part and the Unspeakables as a whole for the loss of their daughter. Orion couldn't blame them, when he thought of how he would have felt if this was Lily's grave in the future, well, he would have blamed the Unspeakables as well. His thoughts turned to the one who had caused Kestrel's death and he scowled. Gryffin had been languishing in the holding cells in the Department of Mysteries for the week in between Orion's escape from Voldemort and the funeral. It was time to return to Hogwarts, where he would make a decision on Gryffin's fate, as well as prepare for the second task which was in a week's time. He still hadn't figured out how he was going to face the Dementors. All his bad memories conjured up at

once would certainly be enough to distract him from fighting, and he had a bad feeling that the champions wouldn't be allowed to fight anyway. Shaking his head, he looked over once more at Kestrel's grieving family before silently leaving the graveyard.

In Potter Manor, Charles was contemplating how to deal with Voldemort. The Dark Lord was still in his prison, and Charles wasn't stupid enough to take him out of it. The former Slytherin descendant might be in miniature form but he still had the potential to cause serious trouble if he escaped. Smiling, Charles picked up the vial and shook it slightly, making Voldemort rattle around the interior. Holding it up to eye level, his smile turned wolfish as he stared at the captive Dark Lord.

"You shouldn't have tried to kill him," he said. Voldemort glared silently at him and Charles shook his head. "Really, you shouldn't have. He's at his most dangerous when he's protecting his family, and you threatened that. Now look where you are."

Voldemort mouthed something at him, and Charles sighed in mock regret. "I'm sorry, I can't hear you," he said. "What was that?"

Voldemort shook his fist and tried battering a hole in the glass but the vial was already strong when it was made, and Orion had added strengthening and anti-breaking charms to it when he'd turned it into Voldemort's prison, so the Dark Lord was going nowhere. Charles grinned and put the vial down. In order to do anything to Voldemort, he'd have to take him out of the vial, and that was something he wasn't prepared to do. Especially not after all Orion had gone through to get Voldemort in there in the first place. Leaning back in his chair, the Potter patriarch looked up at the calendar. In a week's time, he'd see his grandson again, and then they could discuss what to do with their prisoner.

"Dear?" Emma peered into the room, holding a plate. "It's time to feed him again."

Charles sighed. "I know. I wish Orion had transfigured him into something that didn't need food instead of shrinking him, but he did the best he could under the circumstances. Let's shrink it and feed him."

Emma came into the room and put the plate down on the table which was in front of Charles. Aiming her wand at the food, Emma shrank it and then used a special Healer spell to magically transport the food from the plate into the vial. It was a spell used when a patient couldn't eat normally, so the Healers spelled nutrients directly into their stomachs. This was slightly altered but it worked. Voldemort picked up one of the shrunken lamb steaks and eyed it with disgust, but after a moment, hunger overcame him and he began eating. Satisfied that their prisoner was eating normally, the two Potters left him in his prison and retired to the dining room for their own meal. Their thoughts turned to Orion, and Emma frowned.

"Dear, are you sure you should have cast that spell on him when we last saw him?" she asked.

Charles looked at her for a moment and then smiled. "He'll break it anyway," he replied, "and I want him to do that. I'm looking forward to seeing what he says about it when I see him again."

"Playing with him like that could have serious consequences," Emma warned, and Charles nodded.

"I'm aware of that, love, but I also want him to know that I do see him as an adult. He's too deferential towards me at times, and he shouldn't be. If he fights me on this, and I hope he will, it will show him that I'm not about to do anything drastic to him simply because he stood up to me."

"I think you should apologise and then leave him alone," Emma said, disapproval evident in her tone. "It's not fair on him to keep toying

with him like this, and he could react very badly to it."

Charles shrugged. "He's level-headed most of the time. If I explain what I was trying to achieve, he should see reason."

"It's that attitude that will get you into trouble with him," Emma retorted. "Just apologise and don't do it again. You have enough power over him as it is without resorting to tests like this. Stop it before you end up really hurting him."

She got up from the table and stalked into the living room, leaving Charles staring after her. Deciding that he wasn't all that hungry, he went into the living room and straight to the fireplace. It was a safe bet that Orion was going to be angry about the spell, and it was better for the explosion, if there was one, to happen sooner rather than later. Throwing some powder in the fire, Charles called out, "Hunter's lair," which was the Floo address for Orion's quarters in Hogwarts.

Orion looked up at the interruption to his reading. Seeing his grandfather, he scowled, and Charles swallowed. Orion was a lot angrier than he'd thought, and he was suddenly grateful that he was having this conversation by Floo.

"I gather you broke the spell?" he asked, and immediately could have kicked himself for such a lame start. He watched as Orion's eyes changed from gold to green and shivered at the fury present in their depths as Orion glared at him.

"I don't quite know what I can say, except that I'm sorry," he offered, hoping to placate his grandson. He wouldn't be able to explain his reasons if Orion was too furious to listen.

"Don't," Orion snarled. He turned away from the fire, fighting to keep from lashing out at Charles. He knew his grandfather loved him and only wanted him to be safe but he hated being controlled or

manipulated. Behind him he heard his grandfather clear his throat and reined in his anger. Killing Charles would not help, and he really should hear him out. Reluctantly, he turned back to face the fireplace, taking a grim satisfaction in the fact that Charles looked apprehensive about the forthcoming conversation.

"Orion, I only wanted to help you," Charles began. "I understand why you're angry, and I shouldn't have used the method I did, but please, try and understand. If you die, Emma and I lose our grandson, James loses his son, and Severus and Remus lose their father. I don't want to lose you before I have to, so I'm trying to keep you safe."

It didn't have the effect Charles would have liked, as Orion looked angrier than he had at the start. "Do not try and play that game with me," he hissed. "Dumbledore justified his actions toward me the same way, and I refuse to allow myself to be controlled like that again. I won't allow him to control me and it will be a cold day in hell before I allow you to take his place! I'm not a child either, and I don't need a parent anymore. Be a father to James, not me!"

Charles frowned. "I have no intention of playing Dumbledore, Orion. It was a mistake, and one I now regret. Also, I am aware of the fact that you're not a child, and I don't think of you as one. I chose the wrong method of expressing my concern for your welfare, and I can only say I'm sorry."

Orion looked at Charles through narrowed eyes. "My mentor once told me that an apology is only good if given in the time period after tempers have cooled but before the incident is forgotten. Also, everyone involved in the incident have to be ready to discuss and close the issue." He paused and then added harshly, "I'm not ready to forgive and forget just yet. Find me after the second task and we'll talk then."

Orion ended the Floo call very abruptly and returned to his reading. Charles withdrew from the fire in Potter Manor and sat in his favorite

chair. He massaged his temples, feeling a headache coming on.

"Dear? Was everything OK?" Emma asked.

Charles looked at her and smiled crookedly. "I don't know. He was very angry about it, as he had a right to be, but it was the way it ended which is unnerving me."

"How did it end?" Emma pressed. She was inwardly amused at the fact that Orion could unsettle her husband like this, and privately thought that Charles needed a small reality check when it came to their grandson. On hearing the explanation, she chuckled and shook her head.

"What's so amusing?" Charles growled.

"Well, what did you expect?" Emma retorted. "He needs time to calm down and think things through before he even thinks about forgiving you. If he does though, just keep in mind that he won't be likely to forget it in a hurry. Leave him alone for the next week and you might have a more favorable response when we next see him."

Charles looked at her and slowly nodded. Sighing, he picked up a book and opened it, scanning the pages without really taking anything in. His actions towards Orion had been a bit over the top, he realized that now, but he couldn't stand not knowing whether his grandson would forgive him or not. He thought of the grudge that Orion was holding against Dumbledore and winced. Orion was stubborn enough to hold this against him for quite some time if he chose to, so Charles decided to take his wife's advice, with one extra addition. Getting up from his chair, he headed into his study to write a letter.

The next morning, Severus and Remus were having breakfast when the Potter family owl landed in front of them. James looked on, curious, as Severus removed the letter from the owl's leg while

Remus fed it some bacon. They then opened the letter and read it. After reading it once, they blinked, stared at each other, and then read it again.

"What does it say?" James demanded.

"It's weird," Severus responded absently. "Remy, what does Dad's expression look like right now?"

Remus looked up at the staff table and glanced quickly at their father's expression. Orion had spotted the owl and was frowning thoughtfully, but he didn't look angry. Reporting this to Severus, Remus went back to his food.

"This is very weird. I wonder what Dad did," James murmured, handing the letter back to Severus, who folded it and placed it in his bag.

"Whatever it is, we can't ask about it. It's a private matter between our fathers and asking about it will only get Dad angry with us," Remus said practically.

"We should at least answer Uncle Charles though," Severus said as he dug into his bag and withdrew the letter. Sirius leant over to read the letter over James' shoulder as Severus held it up.

Dear Severus and Remus

This might seem like a strange question but if you do something wrong, how do you know whether your father has forgiven you or not, and how long does it take? Does he forgive you immediately or does it take a while? I'm asking this because I recently made a foolish decision which has made your father rather irritated with me and he didn't give me much indication either way about whether he would forgive me or not. Knowing how well he can hold a grudge, I'm rather anxious about it. Any advice would be helpful.

Love,

Uncle Charles.

PS: I and your Aunt Emma will be up at Hogwarts for the second task in a week's time. Hopefully your father will have cooled down by then.

Since they couldn't write the reply while at the table, the Marauders headed for the library. It was a Saturday so there were no classes, and they were the only students in the library this early. Getting some parchment out of his bag, Remus chewed thoughtfully on the end of his quill.

"What do we write?" he asked.

After various ideas were discussed and discarded, a reasonable letter was drafted. Reading it through, Severus and Remus agreed that it was good advice considering they didn't know what had happened. Severus wrote out the final copy on a new piece of parchment and spread it out on the table to dry.

Dear Uncle Charles, the letter read.

Not knowing what happened, we can only offer general advice on the matter. Usually, obtaining Dad's forgiveness for something is a matter of apologizing and promising not to do it again. Dad doesn't hold grudges with us, once we've been punished for something the matter is forgotten and not brought up again, so we don't know why you're worried about him holding a grudge against you. You're family so he shouldn't remain angry for too long. See you next week.

Love,

Severus and Remus

PS: James says hello

Sending it off soon after, they returned to the library and started their homework. They wanted to set up a prank later and had agreed that all their homework for the week should be done first.

A week later Orion was standing at the front of his last class he would teach before the second task. Oddly, it was the third-year Gryffindors and Slytherins, and as he finished putting the homework on the board, the entire class stood up.

"Yes?" Orion asked, his eyebrows raised in query.

"We just wanted to wish you good luck, Professor," Severus said. The rest of the class nodded, and chorused, "Good luck."

Orion smiled. "Thank you. I hope I'll do well, but no matter what the outcome is, I'll still expect this homework to be done by the end of the week."

The class groaned but obediently sat down and noted down the work. Orion was usually easy-going but he did expect that any homework he assigned was done. It wasn't a long assignment anyway, which they were grateful for. His last assignment had been several feet long, this was only one foot. As they left, Orion sank down into his chair and put his head in his hands.

Closing his eyes, he began to reinforce his Occlumency shields, hoping that they would help against the Dementors. Reliving his worst memories over and over again would not be pleasant but Occlumency did help to some degree. He hoped his fellow champions knew it; otherwise the task could be deadly. The Dementors would exploit any weakness, and Orion had no faith that they would obey the Ministry workers if they had a chance to attack and feed at will. Shaking off the depressing thoughts, he headed

outside to the Quidditch pitch, where the second task was to be held.

The other champions were inside a big tent, and all of them were anxious. Abraxas Malfoy was doing his best to hide it, as were the Bulgarians, but the French were openly worried. All of them could feel the cold coming off the Dementors and none of them were happy. Finally, the call came for the champions to walk to the arena.

"Show no fear," Orion murmured, loud enough to be heard by the other champions but not by the spectators. The others nodded, and they walked out as a group, determined not to let the Dementors get to them.

The noise level dropped the second they stepped into the arena. The spectators were separated from the Dementors by a shield, which allowed them to see what was happening, but kept them from being overwhelmed by the cold created by the Azkaban guards. Orion saw James, Severus, and Remus sitting with Charles and Emma in the crowd. He gave the three boys and Emma a slight nod and a small smile, but his smile slid off his face as he stared at Charles, giving him a distinctly unfriendly look.

In the stands, Remus and Severus turned to Charles with looks of amazement. "Merlin, Uncle Charles, what did you do?" Remus said. Severus nodded in wide-eyed agreement.

"Yeah, he's not just irritated, he's really angry with you," he said. Charles sunk down into his seat as James, Severus, and Remus stared at him in shock, and then turned to look down at the arena, searching for Orion. They spotted him just as the champions came to a stop before the judges. Silence fell on the stadium as the crowd waited to hear what the task was.

In the arena, a large building had been constructed, which was, Orion realized with a shudder, an almost perfect replica of Azkaban. Looking to either side, he saw that Abraxas had realized the

significance of the building as well, but their opponents hadn't. Orion caught Abraxas' eye and noted that his supposed ally in the competition was as unnerved as he was but was doing a better job of hiding it. Just then, the organizer of the task came over to them to check that they were ready. Seeing that they were all ready, if nervous, he turned so that he could speak to the crowd as well as to the champions.

Putting his wand to his throat he cast a sonorous charm so he could be heard clearly. "Ladies and gentlemen welcome to the second task of the Triwizard Tournament," he began pompously. "As you can see, our six champions are standing in front of a replica of Azkaban prison. The task is one designed to test their mental endurance, so they will be entering the building without their wands. Once inside, each champion will have to make their way to the bottom level of the building, and retrieve an envelope with their name on it. Inside each envelope are instructions for the third task, so retrieving it is very important. They will have to dodge the Dementors, which will get closer to them with every level they descend to. Once they have their envelopes, the champions will have to return to the surface and show the judges their envelope in order to complete the task. The winner is the person who either completes the whole task, or, if no one finishes the task, the winner is the person who was closest to finishing. If a champion cannot continue with the task, all they have to do is withdraw from the building and tell the judges. They will still get their envelope, but they will lose points for failing to complete the task. Are there any questions?"

Abraxas and Orion exchanged another glance before Abraxas spoke up. In a cool tone, he drawled, "Exactly what is stopping the Dementors from Kissing us?"

The organizer looked flustered for a moment, and then he said, "The corridors are split in half by a set of iron bars which run down the length of the corridors. The Dementors are on one side and you will be on the other. The Dementors cannot get through the bars so you

will be safe from being Kissed, but you will still be able to feel their other effects. If something goes wrong and they do get over onto your side, they have orders not to attack you. Every precaution has been taken to keep you as safe as possible."

Orion snorted. "What about allowing us our wands then," he said when the organizer turned to face him. "They are dangerous creatures after all. I don't think they'll obey the non-attack order if they get the chance. There is a reason they're kept away from the magical society."

The organizer scowled and snapped back, "If you're so worried for your safety, Mr Potter, then you're more than welcome to withdraw!"

The other champions sucked in a sharp breath at the insinuation that Orion was a coward. Orion himself was close to transfiguring the pompous official in front of him into a particularly juicy mouse and feeding him to Mrs Norris, but he restrained the impulse. He stared at the smaller wizard, pouring all his disgust and anger into his gaze, and experienced a thrill of dark satisfaction when the organizer swallowed and looked away hurriedly.

"I will not be withdrawing," Orion hissed. "I was merely concerned for the welfare of my fellow champions, and also the crowd. If the Dementors got loose from the building, they would feed on the crowd, which contains a lot of innocent children, my own among them. If you are intent on making us go through with this, then let's get started. The sooner we do, the sooner it will be over and the Dementors can then be returned to Azkaban."

He turned away from the official and took a deep, steadying breath, reinforcing his shields. He could already faintly hear his parents' deaths replaying in his mind, as well as his family's deaths. Other bad memories were also trying to resurface. He swallowed, and shoved all those memories to the back of his mind. He had to concentrate, and if he was getting jumpy now, when he wasn't even

in the Azkaban replica, how was he going to make it all the way to the bottom level and back? No, he had to concentrate on finishing the task. He could have a mental breakdown later.

The whistle sounded for the beginning of the task, and the champions all entered the building, which, unlike the real Azkaban, had only one level above ground, whereas the real prison had several levels above ground. Only the really dangerous prisoners were housed in the subterranean cells, which were the maximum security cells. The building which had been constructed for the task had evidently been constructed with difficulty in mind. The subterranean levels, combined with the closeness of the Dementors, would make the task more challenging, as well as more entertaining for the spectators.

The champions were now on the first level. They could feel the Dementor on the other side of the bars, but the corridor was wide, and the effects weren't as bad as they would be when the Dementor got closer. Orion felt a tap on his shoulder and turned to see Damyan Avramov behind him.

"Are the bars supposed to be frosted?" the Bulgarian enquired, his accent making it a bit difficult for Orion to understand him at first. Looking to where his fellow champion was indicating, Orion frowned in confusion. The bars were definitely frosting over, even at this early stage, when they shouldn't be. The charms on the bars should prevent this sort of occurrence, as iron tended to get very brittle when exposed to intense cold. He scowled and proceeded onwards. The corridor hadn't yet split in different directions yet, but it would, Orion knew. This was supposed to be a contest and it wouldn't be if there was only one way to the bottom level and back. Shivering, he wrapped his cloak tighter around himself and smiled grimly at the other champions.

"Shall we continue," he said with a slight wave of his hand.

Silence enveloped the group as they moved deeper into the building, the corridor narrowing as they descended to the second level. Here the effects of the Dementors were more pronounced, even though the corridor was only slightly narrower than it was on the first level. The iron bars dividing the corridor in half were also iced over, and Abraxas hissed when he saw them.

"What state will they be in on the last level," he said when the others looked at him. This disquieting thought spurred them onwards, they didn't want to be on the bottom level and have no bars between them and creatures which could easily kill them. As they entered the third level, the corridor split into six different paths. With a grim smile, Orion headed down the far left one, knowing that each champion was bound to take a different path, they'd been told that privately, just before the task started. They could each choose which path to take, but all of them had to take a different one. Each path would eventually lead to the bottom level, but some were more circuitous than others.

"This is not good," Orion muttered as he felt rather than saw the corridor narrow abruptly. He was on the fourth level now, having descended sharply from the above level, and was now face to face with a Dementor. The creature was behind the set of bars that had been installed in each corridor of the building, but it didn't need to touch Orion to harm him. The Unspeakable backed away from the Dementor, fighting not only the urge to run to the surface, but also fighting the surge of memories that was threatening to overwhelm him. He backed up to a junction in the corridor and took the other path, figuring that it was better than staying with a creature that could overwhelm him with memories that he'd rather forget.

As he headed downwards, he heard a faint scream and winced. Someone was definitely having a bad day. He was just glad it wasn't him. Running feet behind him announced the arrival of another champion and he turned to see Abraxas Malfoy running towards him as if a hundred Dementors were after him. Behind him, Orion could

see the other champions and his heart almost stopped when he saw that twenty Dementors were gliding along in pursuit.

"What the hell?" Orion snapped. "I thought there was only supposed to be six in the entire building. Where did these slimy things come from?"

"No idea," one of the French champions said tiredly. "They just appeared from behind us, went through the bars as though they weren't there."

"The bars broke?" Orion queried, trying to run and talk at the same time. He desperately wished he had his wand with him. At least then he could have cast a Patronus.

"Yes. The bars broke from the cold," the other French champion said, her voice quivering with fear and fatigue. "The other Dementors came from behind us, from the top level."

"The top level," Orion whispered, his mind conjuring up horrible possibilities. Looking at his companions, he made a snap decision. "We're all in danger here. We can't fight this many Dementors without wands, so what say we ignore the rules and work together to get out of this. Our lives matter more than points at this stage."

"Agreed, Potter," Abraxas said, keeping pace with him easily, which surprised Orion a little bit. After a few minutes, the Bulgarian and French champions also agreed.

"We can split the points equally, if we survive," Alexsandar Krum said, panting from exertion. "Let's get our envelopes and get out of here."

The six champions broke into a run, the corridor twisting and turning ahead of them, sloping steadily downward. The levels passed without them being consciously aware of them, only the narrowing of the path telling them that they were getting deeper. They had

abandoned all notions of rivalry, each fighting their own personal demons in the form of their own worst memories, as well as doing their best to keep ahead of the twenty Dementors that were chasing them.

"What happened to the six original ones," Abraxas gasped as the corridor finally opened out into a cavern which held six envelopes.

"I think I know," Orion replied grimly, pointing to the six Dementors which were each guarding one envelope.

"This wasn't a test," Damyan hissed angrily. "They meant to kill us."

"No," Orion responded, stretching his senses out, searching for any trace of magic. "There were bars here. The Dementors were supposed to be contained in the middle, and we were supposed to go round the outside and collect our envelopes. The charms failed, and the bars shattered from the extreme cold."

"So its murder designed to look like an accident," Abraxas growled.

"Why do you say that?" Aleksandar asked, facing the Dementors, who had entered the room and were circling it, in no hurry to consume their prey now they'd cornered them.

"Because the charms were supposed to hold no matter what. If the charms were deliberately cast wrong, then they would fade, and the bars would shatter. There would be no evidence left behind to prove that it was anything other than a tragic accident. It would be easy for someone to come down here before the task, and either sap power from the charms, or replace them with less powerful ones, in order to accomplish their goal," Orion answered quietly. He had a fair idea who would want him out of the way that badly but would the person want him dead badly enough to commit five other murders in order to ensure that he died too? He thought it was a possibility but he couldn't voice that suspicion without proof.

All of the champions gathered in the centre of the room, facing the twenty-six Dementors, who were steadily moving closer. The effects proved too much for both French champions, who fainted at the same time. Orion and Aleksandar caught them and lowered them to the floor gently, stepping in front of them to defend them from the Dementors, which appeared to be more excited with every passing minute.

"Potter, do you have a plan to get us out of here?" Abraxas murmured out of the corner of his mouth.

"One, but I'm not sure if it will work on so many," Orion muttered back. He'd sensed the connecting web that existed between the Dementors, and had had a thought. If the bond between the Dementors was anything like the one that existed between twins then his idea should work. If it didn't then they would all die anyway, so it was a fifty-fifty chance and that, in their current situation, was enough.

Drawing in a deep breath, Orion shoved all his bad memories to the back of his mind, and transformed into Salazar. The basilisk coiled up in the chamber, hissing angrily at the Dementors, who drew back as they sensed the large snake. Waiting for the perfect moment, Salazar struck, taking the nearest Dementor in the throat and pumping venom into it. The Dementor thrashed in his jaws, but it was the other Dementors that the five other champions were staring at. The moment that Salazar had bitten the Dementor he now held, the other Dementors had screeched in agony, and backed off.

A soft thump on the floor indicated that Salazar had finished with the Dementor he'd been poisoning, and the champions looked down to see the Dementor's body rapidly dissolving from the venom, which was highly acidic as well as poisonous. More screeches indicated that Salazar had caught another Dementor. The twenty reinforcements had backed out into the corridor, and with Salazar

now blocking the only exit, the four remaining Dementors were now frantically looking for another way out.

Abraxas cried out in pain as one Dementor had the bright idea of trying to Kiss him. The Malfoy patriarch fainted just as Salazar tore into the Dementor holding him, dissolving the creature in seconds. The large snake hissed menacingly and the last three Dementors fled, gliding round Salazar's body and down the tunnel, which Salazar had left unblocked when he'd moved to save Abraxas.

As Orion resumed his human form, he saw that the other champions were staring at him in awe. The two French champions and Abraxas had woken from their faint and as soon as he turned towards him, Abraxas inclined his head respectfully.

"Thank you for saving us, Lord Slytherin," he said, all trace of his normal arrogance gone and in its place was a quiet respect that Orion found unnerving.

"Please, I don't wish to be called that all the time," he said.

"You'll have to get used to it, my Lord," Abraxas responded. "Had you forgotten that the task was being shown on those large screens for the crowd?"

Orion swore, he had indeed forgotten that in the flight from the Dementors. "Damn," he growled. Abraxas chuckled softly, and then smirked when Orion glared at him.

"May we talk later, my Lord?" he asked respectfully.

Orion growled and then said, "Yes, but only if you stop calling me that. I want friends and allies, not followers." Turning to the other champions he said, "Collect your envelopes and let's get out of here. I want to see if those Dementors hurt anyone in the crowd when they fled from here."

The French and Bulgarian champions looked at him and moved slowly to collect their envelopes. Orion and Abraxas followed suit, and then they moved towards the surface as a group. They'd all been scared by the sudden appearance of twenty other Dementors, and by the realization that someone had intended to kill all of them. That experience had forged a new bond between the six champions. They no longer cared about the points that they would get, or about winning. More important now was the task of finding out who had tried to kill them, and why.

Orion stiffened as they entered the first level again. "Wait," he whispered, and the others stopped. By unspoken, mutual consent, they'd agreed to follow his lead, at least until the task ended. Cold flooded the corridor again and the champions groaned as they fell to their knees, the sudden onslaught of bad memories hurting all of them.

"Don't focus on them," Orion groaned, rising to his feet through sheer willpower. He pulled Abraxas to his feet, steadying him as he threatened to fall over again. Once Abraxas was steady, Orion pulled the others to their feet as well. "Are any of you Animagi?" he asked. Negative head shakes answered him and he sighed. 'Why is it always me that has to save everyone?' he thought. "Keep going but be careful," he whispered, before transforming once more into Salazar. The transformation helped, the memories didn't seem so bad now, and the effects of the Dementors were lessened. He quickly transformed back into human form to check what they were up against – snakes, even Basilisks, couldn't truly count, and therefore, relying on Salazar's interpretation of how many enemies were outside would be very stupid.

Peering outside, he growled as he saw the Dementors floating between the entrance of the building, and the judges' table. The crowd looked torn between being terrified at the presence of so many Dementors and being excited at how the champions would overcome

this. Orion pulled his head back inside and turned to his new friends.

"Dementors floating just outside, all twenty-three of them," he reported sourly.

"Can't you transform again?" Damyan asked. "That worked before."

Orion sighed. "I could, but I've got another idea. I want all of us to walk out as a group, and when we get out there, spread out. I need a few minutes to get this idea to work."

"You want us to be bait?" Alexsandar growled, unhappy with the idea.

"No, but I do want to sow confusion amongst them," Orion snapped back. "If necessary, I'll transform but I don't want to do that, not if I can help it."

Alexsandar growled again but grudgingly agreed to the plan. As one, the champions emerged from the building and spread out. The Dementors surged forward, but the champions dodged them, leading them in circles, trying to confuse them. It worked briefly until the Dementors encircled the champions and drove them into a tight circle, with Orion in the middle.

"Now what?" Abraxas growled.

Orion opened his eyes, gathered all his magic around himself and yelled, "EXPECTO PATRONUM!"

A large burst of silver light surrounded Orion and the other champions, blinding the crowd temporarily. The light resolved itself into four huge, silver animals, which charged at the Dementors, driving them not only away from the six champions but away from Hogwarts altogether. The last the crowd saw of the twenty-three surviving Dementors was of them fleeing back to Azkaban like a dark cloud.

Feeling lightheaded from the energy he'd expended, Orion quietly fainted. The crowd, which had been cheering, abruptly stopped but before they could move forward to see what was wrong, the Patroni returned and surrounded Orion, gently but firmly nudging the other champions out of the way. After they'd taken up their positions, they looked straight at Severus, Remus, James, and Sirius, who were all shocked when the animals seemed to almost be assessing them. After a few minutes, the animals dropped their gazes and began trying to get Orion to wake up with gentle nudges. As the medical team who were on standby during the task moved forward to assess the champions, Charles put his head in his hands and groaned.

"What's the matter, Dad?" James asked, turning round to face his father.

Charles gave him a small smile. "Nothing's ever quiet with your uncle around, James. I hate to think what the next few days will be like."

James shrugged and turned back to watch the end of the task. He had the oddest feeling, like he should know the huge stag that was guarding his uncle, along with the panther, wolf, and dog. The stag had looked straight at him, had picked him out among the crowd, and he had no idea why.

"Did any of you get any weird feelings just now?" he asked his friends. Sirius, Remus, and Severus all nodded. "I felt that I should know that dog down there," Sirius admitted with a shiver. James looked at Severus who shrugged. "The panther seemed to be looking right at me," he said with a frown. "It was weird."

"That wolf looks very familiar," Remus chipped in, keeping his eyes trained on Orion. "Why did they pick us out instead of anyone else?"

"I don't know but we have to look into it," James said determinedly. "Something about Uncle Orion's Patroni are significant, but we have

to find out what it is. This is a new clue to his secret."

"You will do nothing of the sort," Charles broke in sharply. "A person's Patronus is not something to question or investigate. The form it takes is significant to that person, and is not meant to be understood by anyone else."

"But Dad," James complained as the Potters began to make their way down to Orion, "they looked right at us. Me, Remus, Sirius, and Sev. It's like they're meant to mean something to us as well as to Uncle Orion. Why can't we discover that meaning?"

"Because he won't want you poking round his private life to that extent," Charles retorted as sharply as he'd spoken before. "If I find out that you've been pestering him about this, James, I'll ground you until you're eighteen. Leave this particular piece of your uncle's life alone, it will only hurt him if you don't."

James looked rebellious for a moment but a glare from his father quelled any thoughts of disobedience. "Will he be OK?" he asked instead as they drew close to Orion, who was now sitting up with the assistance of one Healer, and also the panther, who was providing a solid surface for him to lean back against. The dog and wolf were standing in front of Orion, guarding him, and as Charles knelt beside Orion, the stag trotted over beside him.

"I'm not going to hurt him," Charles said quietly. The silver stag, which had lost none of its brilliance, despite Orion being less than coherent at that moment, stared at him silently, before bowing its antlered head and backing up and lying down beside Orion.

"Hi Prongs," Orion murmured tiredly. He lifted a hand to stroke the Patronus' neck, and groaned. "Why does my head hurt?" he asked.

"Because you expended a great deal of energy. A wandless Patronus is very draining," Madam Pomfrey snapped as she bustled up to him.

Kneeling beside him, she checked his eyes, and ran her wand over him, casting a diagnostic charm. "You'll be my patient for a while, Lord Slytherin. Let these Patroni fade, it will save your energy."

"Can't," Orion said wearily. "Not a spell, it stopped being a spell when I fainted." He closed his eyes again, letting his head fall forward, missing the confused expressions on the faces of everyone within hearing range. Charles moved forward and caught him, feeling his grandson's head settle onto his shoulder. Lifting him up, Charles stood.

"I'll take him to the infirmary," he said. He glared at the crowd who had gathered round the arena. "Let us through please," he growled.

"That's Lord Slytherin," one of the students piped up.

"He's also a member of my family and right now he needs to rest and recover from the task," Charles snapped back. "Move."

The crowd parted and let Charles through. Behind Charles, the whispers started, and Severus found himself surrounded by his Housemates.

"You never told us your father was Lord Slytherin!" Nott said accusingly.

Severus gave him a cool stare. "He didn't want me telling anyone until he revealed it himself," he replied. "Now, if you don't mind, I'd like to go check on my father." Parchment crumpled under his foot as he started towards the castle and he stopped. On the ground was his father's envelope for the third task. Looking at the judges, who were busy talking, and the other champions, who were surrounded by their own friends and family; he tucked it into his robes and continued to follow Charles. Remus, Sirius, and James fell in beside him and as they walked up to the infirmary they realized they weren't alone. The stag, wolf, dog, and panther were with them, and the four boys

shared a look.

Now they really had to find out what the animals' significance was, no matter what Charles or even Orion thought about it. It was a clue that had to be explored. The stag nudged James, and as he looked up into the silver eyes of the large creature, he shivered.

"What's wrong," Sirius asked.

"Is it worth it?" James asked. "We know these animals are significant somehow, but if we go down this path, will we like what we find?"

Sirius looked at the dog walking by his side, and then looked at his friends. "Yes. I know he's your uncle, James, and your father, Sev and Remy, but we need to find out. Something is drawing me to this dog, and I'm going to go crazy if I don't find out what it is. What could it hurt?"

"Um, there is that threat your Dad made, James," Remus said.

James snorted. "He won't ground me for that long. He might ground me for a bit, but not for years. Don't worry about it."

As they reached the infirmary, the Marauders stopped. The Patroni looked at them, and stopped as well. Breathing out a sigh, James faced the stag, and noticed that Severus, Remus, and Sirius faced the panther, wolf, and dog at the same time.

"Who are you?" they asked in unison.

Predictably, the animals didn't answer.

Author Note

Well, I'm back everyone. I've had my computer back for a couple of weeks now, but this chapter was giving me trouble, hence why it's

later than I'd like it to be. Still, I hope you enjoy my take on the second task, and keep reading when I post the next instalment.

May the Force be with you

Padawan Lynne

Chapter Thirty Five: Reconciliation and an Unpleasant Shock

Orion opened his eyes slowly, and upon seeing where he was, promptly shut them again. "I hate this place," he muttered, slowly stretching his arms and legs to check for any injuries. Finding none, he opened his eyes fully, and blinked several times to focus them. Looking around, he frowned when he saw that the hospital wing had apparently been taken over while he was asleep.

Charles was sleeping in the chair next to his bed, and Emma was in the bed next to him. James, Severus, Remus, Sirius, and Lily were arranged in chairs round his bed, all sound asleep and Orion frowned when he saw that the boys had silver companions with them.

"Go away," he whispered firmly to the silver Patroni, who looked at him reprovingly. "I can't talk to you when you're like this, and you're going to cause no end of questions. Please, I'll talk to you later," he pleaded.

The animals looked at each other, and then him, before vanishing. Laying his head back on his pillow, Orion sighed. At least his whispered commands to the spirit version of his family hadn't woken his "real" family. He needed time, both to come to terms with how he'd effectively outed himself as Lord Slytherin, and also how to deal with Charles. They needed to talk, that much Orion knew, but he didn't know whether he was calm enough to do so yet. Whenever he thought of what Charles had done, anger rose within him once more, and that couldn't be allowed to happen if they were to have a productive, reconciliatory conversation.

"Actually, Harry, a bit of anger might help, just don't let it take over," James advised in his mind.

"Really?" Orion queried. "Why? I wanted to kill him when he Flooded me."

"We know," Severus cut in, sounding like he was fighting back a laugh. "You have to admire his creativity though."

"No I don't," Orion snapped back. He sighed, and forced his temper down. Severus wasn't the one he was angry with, and therefore didn't deserve to be on the receiving end of his temper.

"I just don't know if I'm ready to bury the hatchet," he explained. "How can I trust him not to do this again?"

"Once he gives his word, he won't break it," James said firmly. "Get him to give that, which shouldn't be too much trouble, and the issue is solved."

"What do I say to him though?" Orion asked. He wanted to forgive his grandfather, he hated the conflict that now existed between them, but he didn't know if he could say the words and actually mean them.

"If you're not sure yet, then tell him you still need more time," Lily said after a few minutes. "Forgiveness can't be rushed, and if you say that you do forgive him, then you have to truly mean it. If you don't mean it, then that just causes more problems later on."

Orion thought about that for a while and then nodded. "Thanks, Mum," he said, receiving a mental hug from his mother. Seeing the clock next to his bed and noticing the early hour, he closed his eyes and went back to sleep. He could talk with Charles and deal with everything else later in the morning. A thought floated through his mind and he groaned. Charles wasn't the only one he had to deal with. There was still the matter of Gryffin as well. Croaker was getting impatient for the issue to be resolved one way or another, or so Reaper had told him in a letter delivered by a Department of Mysteries owl.

Later that morning, Orion awoke properly and was greeted by enthusiastic hugs from James, Severus, and Remus, a nearly

bone-crushing hug from Emma, and a quick hug from Lily, who, despite having been friends with Severus, Remus, and James for several years, was still a bit uncomfortable with showing affection towards Orion. He knew this and didn't press it, counting each hug from her as precious, especially since she didn't know his actual relationship to her. Sirius just smiled at him and said that he was glad that Orion was OK, which Orion accepted with a nod and a small smile.

"Orion," Charles said, sounding very reluctant to address him.

"Yes," Orion said coolly, causing the others present to wince. His tone of voice left very little doubt as to his mood. Severus and Remus promptly got up and began heading towards the door.

"Where are you going?" Charles asked, as James, Sirius, Lily, and Emma followed the pair.

"We don't want to be around when Dad kills you," Severus said bluntly, smirking as Orion rolled his eyes.

"Yeah, it was nice knowing you, Uncle Charles," Remus added, before quickly escaping out the door as Orion threw a pillow at him in mock reproof. When the room was empty apart from the two men, Orion flicked his wand and cast a privacy charm before turning to face his grandfather.

"Well?" he said, and Charles abruptly felt like one of Orion's children, rather than his grandfather. He was finding it very difficult to meet Orion's accusing gaze and all his prepared speeches evaporated into thin air. He swallowed hard.

'Are you a Gryffindor or not?' he silently asked himself, and then closed his eyes as he remembered that he'd willingly ceded that Lordship to Orion, so not only was Orion his grandson, he was also Lord Gryffindor as well as Lord Slytherin. Eying Orion's stern

expression and seeing increasing signs of impatience, he swallowed and decided that rehearsed speeches wouldn't have gone down well with him anyway.

"I don't know what you want me to say," he finally said, meeting Orion's gaze squarely.

Orion sighed. "An apology would be nice, as well as an explanation for why you chose to act as you did. I was humiliated when I realized what spell you cast on me."

Charles winced. "I know, Orion. I can only say I'm sorry. I wanted to make sure you were safe but I chose the wrong method. I can see that now, but I wasn't thinking about that before. I didn't mean to humiliate you."

"What were your intentions apart from making sure that I'm safe?" Orion queried. He was slowly calming down, Charles' regret for his actions was visible, but he wasn't quite ready to let him off the hook yet.

"Er, mostly to just keep you safe, no matter what," Charles finally admitted. He didn't want to let Orion know the second reason for his choice of spell, and hoped that he wouldn't ask.

"So you think I'm incapable of taking care of myself?" Orion queried. He wondered if it was wrong of him to enjoy watching Charles squirm like this. He certainly didn't enjoy it when it was Severus or Remus, so what was different now?

"The difference is that with our younger selves, you're usually disciplining them for one thing or another," Remus said in his mind.

"Whereas now, it's another adult who has wronged you, one you can't do anything to other than yell at, so you're perfectly entitled to enjoy watching him squirm," Severus added.

"Thanks," Orion said mentally, and smirked as he watched Charles' expression. It had changed from apprehensive, to hopeful, and was now moving towards resigned.

"Of course I don't think that," Charles protested hurriedly. "I know you can protect yourself, it's just that when I cast that spell, you'd just come back from being Voldemort's prisoner, and I was worried about your health. I wanted to keep you somewhere where you had access to a healer if necessary, and also so you could spend more time with our respective children."

Orion tilted his head to one side, frowning. "Our children spent the last two years at Hogwarts, away from me, without any noticeable ill effects," he said slowly. "While it's understandable that they would be worried about me immediately following the escape from Voldemort, they also know that I'm fully recovered from that, and they're more likely to want to spend their time plotting pranks than being with me."

"I doubt that," Charles said, smiling slightly. "You do know that they're going to try to find out what your Patroni represent. How long do you think it'll be before they discover the truth?"

"A bit longer I hope," was Orion's response. He was now very glad that he'd got his spirit family to vanish when they had. All it needed was for James to remember his unauthorized transformation into a fawn when he was younger, and there went any hope of keeping his secret.

Realising that they'd got off track, Orion frowned and said, "So you decided to take away my freedom of choice, and confine me to Hogwarts all because you were worried about me?"

Charles winced again, it sounded quite bad when Orion put it like that. "That's pretty much it, yes," he admitted, wondering if Orion could forgive his bad judgment. His grandson seemed to be considering

something, although Charles couldn't tell what. Once more, he prayed that Orion wouldn't ask about other reasons.

His hopes were dashed as Orion almost innocently enquired, "Are you sure there isn't any other reason you cast that particular spell?"

Charles made the mistake of looking directly at Orion as he prepared to answer. His eyes were immediately trapped by the younger Potter's intense stare, and he found himself blurting out the answer without being able to stop himself.

"I wanted to provoke you into reacting," he said.

Orion's eyes narrowed. "What do you mean?" he said, keeping his tone neutral with an effort.

Charles was now frantically trying to think of an acceptable explanation but that truth-stare caught his gaze again and once more, the truth fell out of him without him being able to do anything about it. "I thought you were too deferential towards me and wanted to provoke you into being angry with me so you could see that I wouldn't do anything drastic simply because you stood up for yourself," he said in a rush.

Orion closed his eyes and took a deep breath. "Let me get this straight. You wanted to provoke me into losing my temper because you think I'm too deferential towards you. You also attempted to conceal that by saying that you were worried about my health." He broke off, and his eyes flashed to green as his temper rose again. "Well congratulations," he said sarcastically, "you achieved your objective. I'm now officially angry with you. Not just angry, I'm actually utterly furious!" He threw off the covers and got out of the bed, stalking towards Charles like an angry lion.

"How dare you attempt to manipulate me like that," he hissed, taking only the barest notice of the fact that he was backing Charles around

the hospital wing. "I don't need another Dumbledore in my life, and if you try and imitate him, then I will voluntarily disown myself and resurrect the Slytherin line and name, because I will not live under someone else's thumb EVER AGAIN!"

His magic flared with the last two words, and Charles took several steps back. He'd played with fire and now it seemed like he was about to be burnt. "Orion, please," he said. "I didn't mean to hurt you; I just wanted you to know that you can be yourself around me. You don't have to give way to me all the time."

Orion was very close to transforming into Salazar and petrifying his grandfather. "I am not too deferential towards you," he spat, reining in his anger as the nearby beds rattled in protest. "I happen to share many of your views on things, so when we discuss those areas of common interest, of course I'm going to agree with you." He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, firmly ignoring the cheering which was going on in his mind. He didn't need distractions at this point in time.

When he had the urge to kill his grandfather firmly under control, he opened his eyes again and gave vent to his feelings with a snarl that would have done Shadow proud. Charles swallowed hard, that snarl didn't sound friendly at all, and he noticed that Orion's eyes were still Avada Kedavra green, which didn't bode well for him.

"Er, Orion, please, calm down," he said feebly.

"Calm down!" Orion growled. "I am not going to exchange Dumbledore for you!"

"I'm not trying to do that," Charles suddenly snapped, his own temper rising as he realised that continuing to be defensive would not help him in the current situation, and besides, he resented being lumped in with a man who would bind other people's magic and make them into loyal pets. Taking a steadying breath, he pinned Orion with a

glare of his own and growled, "You've yelled at me for quite long enough! I accept that what I did was wrong, and I've explained my reasons for why I chose to act as I did. Now please, can we just put this behind us?"

Orion was taken aback as Charles abruptly went on the offensive, but his anger cooled as he listened to what he was saying. Closing his eyes, he took a breath, gathered the last of his anger, and released it with a huff. "Alright," he said, opening his eyes again. "Let's put this behind us. Do I have your word that if you have any concerns about me that you'll discuss them with me first before casting anything on me? I don't mind you casting a protection spell on me, but I would prefer to know about it before you do. Understood?"

Charles let out a relieved sigh and stepped forward, holding out his hand. Orion took it, not quite knowing what to expect, but what he got wasn't what he expected at all. Looking him directly in the eyes, Charles said, "I, Charles Potter give my word that I will not cast any spell on Harry James Potter without his full knowledge and consent unless a situation arises in which action must be taken and consent cannot be given beforehand. This I swear on my honor as Head of the Potter Family." Magic swirled round him as he spoke, signifying that he was sincere in his promise.

Orion nodded mutely, and managed to say, "A normal promise would have sufficed but thank you all the same." He looked down at their hands, which were still entwined, and then pulled Charles into a rough hug. "I think we're OK now, aren't we?"

"Yes," Charles said with a smile. "Although I now feel very sorry for Severus and Remus. It's no wonder they don't get into trouble very often."

Orion looked puzzled for a minute and then he began to laugh so hard that he sat down on a nearby bed. "I was much harder on you

than I ever am on them," he managed to choke out between bouts of laughter. "I can't yell at them that way, because I don't think that they'd handle it well, but since you're older and tougher than they are, I allowed myself to let go a bit more than normal."

Charles shook his head. "Well, I'll be quite glad if I never experience that again. Do you know that you resembled your great-grandfather quite strikingly for a few minutes there?"

Orion grinned and said innocently, "Really? Hmm, fancy that. I think we should go and reassure our three Marauders that I haven't killed you and disposed of the body."

"Three Marauders? Orion, you're a Marauder yourself, you just can't let anyone know it," Charles laughed as they walked out of the hospital wing, breaking into a quick jog as Poppy Pomfrey screeched from behind them, "Orion Potter, get back in bed right now!" Ignoring the mediwitch, Orion led the way to his quarters, where they found all four Marauders, Emma, and Lily in the lounge area.

"How nice to see that you're making yourselves at home," Orion drawled, but the sparkle in his eyes told the visitors that they were more than welcome.

"Oh, you didn't kill him," James said.

"You sound disappointed," Charles said with a raised eyebrow.

James shrugged. "Well, if you died, that would mean that I'd be Lord Potter. Or, er, would it be you, Uncle Orion?"

"Technically, as you're his son, you'd inherit the title. I can't inherit it, or at least, not yet," Orion replied with a grin as Charles turned an outraged expression on his son.

"You actually wanted him to kill me?" he demanded.

James shook his head. "No, but we were amusing ourselves with the various ways that he could dispose of your body if he had."

"As well as discussing your Patroni, Dad," Remus cut in. At Orion's frown, he hurried on, "Well, it's not really normal for a Patronus to be four animals instead of one. What do they represent?"

Orion thought about it for a minute or two. He had to be very delicate here. Finally he hit on the answer and he grinned. "What is a Patronus?" he said. "Answer that and you have your answer, or at least, all the answer you're going to get at this point."

His work communicator vibrated and he scowled as he pulled it out. "Yes," he said, and listened as a voice came through from the other end. "Oh very well. No, I can't leave right now, bring him to Hogwarts and we'll deal with him in private." Shutting the communicator, he frowned as he faced enquiring, curious looks.

"Work situation. The idiot who caused my friend's death needs to be dealt with and I've been putting it off because of all the stuff going on here. However, the situation does need to be resolved and the time is apparently now."

"How will it be resolved?" Sirius asked, morbid curiosity lacing his tone.

"I can't tell you, because then I'd have to kill you," Orion said with a small smirk. "It's work, and that's all I really can say about it."

"Oh damn, and here we thought we were going to get a glimpse into the life of an Unspeakable," Sirius complained jokingly.

"What makes you think I'm an Unspeakable?" Orion queried.

Sirius looked as though he wanted to roll his eyes but didn't quite dare to. "Because of what Sev and Remy have said about it. They've said that you work for the Ministry, but the sort of work you do isn't able to be talked about. If you were an Auror, they'd just say so, so it had to be something top-secret, and the only sort of job like that at the Ministry is in the Department of Mysteries, which means you have to be an Unspeakable."

Orion nodded slowly. "Has anyone else figured it out?"

"We don't discuss you where anyone else can hear," Remus said indignantly. "It's just us, and we can keep a secret."

As Orion frowned, Severus spoke up. "Dad, really, it's a logical deduction to make, and no one else knows. Why are you afraid of people knowing?"

Orion was silent for a long time and then he sighed. "It's not that I'm afraid of people knowing," he said. "It's just that when people know you're an Unspeakable, they either look at you with suspicion because they don't know exactly what you do, or they think that it's a glamorous job that lets you play with magic that most people never get to see."

"What's it really like then?" James asked.

"It's not as glamorous as you may think," Orion warned. "It's a tough job, odd hours, dangerous assignments. Plus, when we're not out on assignment, we do lots of research into areas of magic that could very easily kill us. Could you handle that?"

The Marauders looked at each other and then said in unison, "Yes!"

Orion chuckled. "Well, we'll see. In a few years that might change, but for now, I need to bid you farewell, and please, go do some homework, or visit friends or whatever. I'm going to be very tired

when I come back and won't be up for much company."

Remus and Severus looked hurt for a moment and then Severus enquired cautiously, "Does that mean that if we need you during the night, we can't come and get you?"

Orion blinked in shock and then realised how his words must have sounded. "No, you can come and get me if you need me," he said. "I just meant that immediately following dealing with the work situation, I'm going to need some alone time to work out any issues surrounding it, OK."

Locking eyes with Severus, he said, "I'll still want to see you for Occlumency tonight, unless you'd rather move it to another evening?"

Severus shook his head and the agreement was made that he would turn up at Orion's quarters for Occlumency that evening after dinner. Once that was sorted, the Marauders, accompanied by Lily, Charles, and Emma, left Orion to deal with work while they went to the library – the students to work on their homework, while Charles and Emma took a walk round Hogwarts, reminiscing about their own days there.

As they worked on their homework, the quiet discussion between the Marauders turned to what Orion was like at work. Naturally, none of them knew exactly what he was like at work, and that raised their curiosity. After a while, James, Severus and Remus closed their books and got up.

"Where are you going?" Lily asked, looking up from her Ancient Runes translations.

"To spy on Uncle Orion," James answered, keeping his voice low so that the other students nearby couldn't hear. "Sirius, are you coming?"

Sirius looked at his homework, and then at the time. His face fell as he answered, "No, sorry. My father wants to talk to me and Regulus about how we're coping with both of us in separate houses. He wants us to be more like you two," he looked towards Severus and Remus, "but I don't like the guys that Reg's hanging round with, and Reg resents that. Dad's got tired of it, I guess, so we're having a big family meeting in ten minutes."

"OK. We'll tell you what happened later," James said. He, Severus, and Remus headed for the Room of Requirement, where they'd be able to spy on Orion from a position of relative safety.

"What do we want from the room?" Remus whispered as they stood in front of the blank wall. Severus shook his head silently while James paced in front of the wall, thinking hard. Finally, the door appeared and they entered. Severus and Remus looked shocked at the big screen TV and comfortable couches in front of them. James looked rather smug as he noticed that the room had even provided popcorn.

"The movie about life as an Unspeakable is about to start. Sit down and enjoy," he said, flopping onto one of the couches and grabbing a handful of popcorn. Severus and Remus looked at each other, and then followed his example. As soon as they'd sat down, the screen flickered and Orion came into view. Settling back, the boys fixed their gazes on the screen and watched.

Orion was standing at the front door of Hogwarts, watching as three wizards came into view. Reaper and Diamond were all but dragging Gryffin up the path, and the expression on their faces was unpleasant. Gryffin looked terrified, and he had good reason to be.

When they reached him, Orion glared at Gryffin, and then turned his cold gaze to Reaper and Diamond. "Follow me," he said coolly, turning on his heel and walking towards the staircase. Reaper and Diamond followed, dragging Gryffin with them when he tried to resist.

Spotting a couple of students up ahead, Orion quickly opened a secret passage and led his team into it. He might have to deal with Gryffin at Hogwarts, but he wasn't about to announce the fact that he was an Unspeakable to the whole school. If a student saw him with three other Unspeakables then that news would be all over the school in a matter of hours and it wouldn't be too hard for some of the brighter ones to use the same logic as Sirius had to figure out his true job.

"Where are we going?" Diamond asked, keeping his voice low.

"To a place where we won't be disturbed," Orion answered as the passage sloped downwards. He'd chosen the passage he had because it led directly to the Chamber of Secrets. Salazar Slytherin had made several passages which led to it, so that he wouldn't be trapped down there with only one way in or out. As they neared the Chamber, he went over the renovations he'd made to it. He didn't want to expose his private workplace to his team, nor did he want them seeing the remodeled living space either. Frowning, he thought about where to conduct the interrogation, and then smiled coldly as he thought of the perfect place. There was an abandoned chamber a little bit away from the main one that he'd not done anything with, and it was far enough away that the rest of the renovations wouldn't be noticed. Bleak, cold, and damp, it was the perfect place to deal with the current situation.

"Guys, what do you think they're going to do?" Remus asked. He'd stopped eating in favor of watching the screen, but he was feeling uneasy about continuing what they were doing.

"I don't know but I don't think it's going to be nice," James answered. Unlike Remus, he was still watching eagerly, while Severus was somewhere in the middle, wanting to watch, but feeling more and more uneasy about what might happen. Orion seemed so different from what he was usually like and that was starting to scare him.

Back in the tunnels leading to the Chamber of Secrets, Orion had led his team to the chamber he'd selected. Reaper and Diamond dropped Gryffin and smirked at his yelp when he landed roughly on the hard stone. "What are we going to do with him?" Reaper asked.

"I want some answers before we do anything else," Orion said menacingly, and Gryffin shivered, the tone of his leader's voice was enough to tell him that he wouldn't be leaving the chamber alive.

"Why did you kill Kestrel?" Diamond enquired, kicking Gryffin in the ribs.

Gryffin glared up at them and snarled, "I didn't. The Dark Lord did!"

Reaper snorted, and was about to say something when Orion interrupted. "He might have cast the spell but Kestrel wouldn't have died if you hadn't used her as a shield!" His eyes turned to their emerald green colour and then turned Avada Kedavra green as his temper rose.

"Crucio!" he hissed.

James, Severus, and Remus winced as Gryffin screamed in agony. They watched as the torture ended and Orion reached down, pulling Gryffin to his feet. Still holding him, Orion slammed him into the wall of the chamber several times and then dropped him. The dark chuckle which escaped him as Gryffin let out a pained groan made the boys, who were still watching in the Room of Requirement, close their eyes. This wasn't fun anymore but something made them keep watching.

"Care to try answering that question again?" Orion enquired.

Gryffin was breathing shallowly, fighting to think through the pain that was threatening to overwhelm him. "I made a mistake," he hissed

through clenched teeth. "I panicked, OK. I didn't think."

"No, you didn't," Reaper drawled. He was about to curse Gryffin again, when Orion held up a hand, stopping him.

"Do you know what your first mistake was?" he enquired.

Gryffin looked up at him and struggled to a sitting position. "Trying to take on the Dark Lord," he coughed.

Orion shook his head and growled, "No. Your first mistake was disobeying my order to fall back. You decided that you knew better than me and charged into a duel which you had no hope of ever winning, which forced the rest of us to come after you."

Reaching down, he pulled Gryffin to his feet and slammed him against the wall again, this time holding him there, a little way off the ground. Gryffin coughed and wheezed as Orion's fingers closed round his throat, cutting off a good portion of his air. "Listen to me," Orion hissed, his voice dropping so low that it was almost inaudible to anyone but them. "Out in the field, we are supposed to be a team! As team leader, I'm in charge of ensuring that we're all safe. That means that when I give an order, I expect it to be obeyed. Got that?"

"Yes," Gryffin coughed, struggling to breathe through Orion's tight grip. Noticing this, Orion loosened his hold and let Gryffin slide down the wall to land in a crumpled heap on the ground again.

"Now that we've got that sorted," he said, giving Gryffin a hard nudge in the ribs with the toe of his boot, "I think it's time to get round to the real punishment." As Gryffin's eyes widened, Orion smirked. "You didn't actually believe that we'd let you get away with killing Kestrel? Oh no, we're going to make you pay for what you've done. Reaper, Diamond, you may now show him how much you dislike what he did, but don't kill him."

"Why not, Boss?" Reaper asked, sounding very disappointed.

Orion smiled viciously, and replied, "Because we'll kill him together. No immediately fatal or life-threatening curses please."

"So we can't vanish his ribcage?" Diamond enquired.

Orion shook his head. "It's a good idea, but no, you can't. Apart from that, be as creative as you wish. Just don't sink to the Death Eaters' level."

Gryffin staggered to his feet and tried to run but Reaper's well aimed bone-breaking curse hit his legs and he fell to the ground with a scream as his legs shattered underneath him. Diamond joined in and cast a curse which had Gryffin feeling as though he was cooking from the inside out.

James, Remus, and Severus were still in the Room of Requirement, watching in horror and fascination. The horror was for the punishment being inflicted on the helpless Gryffin and the fascination lay in the sheer number of spells that were being used. They hadn't realised that some of the spells being used even existed.

"Why doesn't Dad put a stop to it," Severus whispered, covering his eyes as Diamond broke all of Gryffin's joints with a terrifying, methodical precision.

"Because he approves of it," Remus whispered, looking as sick as Severus felt.

"I think I now know why Uncle Orion didn't want us around," James said, looking very green as Orion used the Alopecia charm to selectively remove all the hair from various parts of Gryffin's body, seeming to enjoy Gryffin's shrieks as the hair was ripped out by the roots.

"Can we stop watching," Remus begged. "I think I'm going to be sick."

James concentrated hard, and then looked shocked. "It won't stop," he yelled. "Where's the remote control?"

"Did you ask the room for one?" Severus asked, trying to convince his stomach to stay in one place.

"No, but I didn't think we'd need one," James admitted. "Can we leave?"

Remus tried the door. "It's locked," he cried, and tugged on the door handle furiously.

"I think it's almost over anyway," Severus said.

Remus came back to the couch and curled up beside him, shaking. James joined them and the three huddled together, trying to turn off the sound from the screen even if they couldn't turn it off entirely.

Unaware that they were being watched, Orion put a halt to the creative punishment that Reaper and Diamond were inflicting on Gryffin and crouched beside him. "Had enough?" he enquired.

Gryffin nodded, almost sobbing with pain. "Yes," he whimpered. "Please, let me go."

Orion looked regretful. "I'm afraid we can't do that. No other team wants you and you know too much for us to Oblivate you and let you go. If you say you're sorry for killing Kestrel, we'll make your death quick."

Gryffin had had enough. He'd never imagined that he could feel as much pain as he currently was, and he wanted it to end. "Alright," he mumbled. "I'm sorry, I admit I killed Kestrel, just please, make it

stop."

Orion nodded and stood up. "Together," he said, looking towards Reaper and Diamond. They nodded and walked over to stand beside him. Aiming their wands at their former team mate, they gathered their magic for the last spell they would cast on him.

"Avada Kedavra!" they said in unison. Three jets of green light streaked towards Gryffin, killing him instantly when they made contact. After the light from the spells had faded, Orion crouched beside the motionless body and checked for a pulse. Finding none, he stood up again and moved back to his two surviving team members.

"Dead," he said tonelessly.

"How are we going to dispose of it?" Diamond asked.

Orion smiled humorlessly. Come to me, he hissed.

Diamond and Reaper stood back as a massive basilisk slid into the chamber from one of the side tunnels. You called? it hissed to Orion, who nodded and reached up to rub the snake's neck.

Yes. Are you hungry? Orion asked.

The basilisk hissed thoughtfully, leaning down to rub its nose against Orion's cheek. I have just returned from a successful hunt but I think I have room for one more snack. What are you offering?

This, Orion hissed, indicating Gryffin's body. He stood back as the basilisk dropped its head to sniff at the corpse.

A very fine snack, thank you, master, it hissed before biting Gryffin in half and swallowing the pieces in quick succession. Diamond and Reaper looked a little green but Orion watched neutrally.

How are you? he hissed quietly.

I am well, thank you. How are you and your nestlings? the basilisk asked. Orion smiled at the description of Severus and Remus, and rubbed the large snake's nose.

They are fine, as am I, he answered. I have to go and see to my friends, but I'll come back to talk later. I have some work that I need to do down here and we can talk then.

The basilisk bobbed its head up and down in a rough approximation of a nod. Until later, master. I would like to see what you look like as a basilisk as well. I can sense it within you and would very much like to see it.

Orion turned away from his conversation to find Reaper and Diamond looking at him at shock. "Uh, boss, you're a parselmouth," Reaper said slowly.

"I'm Lord Slytherin, you knew that already," Orion pointed out a bit irritably. "The Slytherin line is known to have the Parseltongue talent."

"Well, yes, but we haven't heard you speak it before. It's creepy but good as well," Diamond said, keeping a wary eye on the basilisk, who was looking at him as though it was considering him for it's next snack.

"Don't worry, she's full," Orion said with a smirk.

"Then why is she looking at me," Diamond asked.

"Because she thinks you smell interesting," Orion said after listening to a hissed explanation from the basilisk.

Diamond looked shocked for a moment and then chuckled ruefully. "Well, as long as I don't end up on the menu, I think I can live with that. What do we tell Croaker?"

Orion frowned. "We tell him that Gryffin has been dealt with and won't be a problem anymore."

Reaper and Diamond nodded and looked around. "So, which way is the way out?"

"This way," Orion said, leading the remnants of his team out of the tunnels and back up to the school. When they got to the massive front doors, Orion looked at Reaper and Diamond. "I'll tell Croaker that the situation has been resolved. Go home, get some rest, and hopefully soon we can get back to work on the buried treasure issue. We've got one more to go, and once that's been found we can get rid of Voldemort for good."

Reaper and Diamond silently nodded. As they were about to leave, Reaper looked closely at Orion and said, "Are you alright, boss? I mean, we were pretty vicious down there."

Orion sighed. "I'm OK. I'm not entirely happy about what happened, but he had to die, and interrogations can get rather brutal at times. I'll be fine. What about you?"

Reaper and Diamond shrugged. "We're relieved that he's dead, and that we got a chance to pay him back for what he did to Kestrel. If it had continued further it would have been too close to what Death Eaters do to their victims but you put a stop to it before then so we're essentially OK with what happened," Diamond answered.

Orion nodded and thought for a few minutes before shaking his head. "Go on, take a few days off. If you need counseling or any other help, the Department does make that available to us, so use it if you need to. Other than that, I'll see you later, with the location of the last item

of treasure hopefully."

Reaper and Diamond left Hogwarts for a few days of rest. The wondered if Hunter was really as OK as he'd said he was. The interrogation had been more brutal than normal, and what had happened afterwards was uncomfortably close to how Death Eaters played with their victims. Knowing Hunter's extreme dislike for Death Eaters, they were willing to bet that he was more unsettled by Gryffin's interrogation and death than he would ever let them know. Still, as close as it had come, they hadn't quite sunk to the Death Eater's level, which was some comfort for them as they Apparated away. They just hoped that their leader recovered from it as well.

Orion made his way to the Astronomy tower after they'd left, and stood up there for a long time. The wind whipped round him, turning his hair into a mess but he ignored that, long used to the fact that his hair was usually an untamable mess anyway. He couldn't shake the feeling that he'd missed something in the chamber, something important. Frowning, his mind drifted back to the earlier conversation with the Marauders, and he stiffened. He'd been sure that he and his team hadn't been followed down to the chamber but there were other ways to spy on people without actually being present. He hoped he was wrong, what had happened down in the chamber shouldn't be witnessed by children, and especially not the Marauders. They'd been exposed to too much death already.

"I think the real reason you didn't want them seeing that little display is that you're afraid that they'll start to fear you, or worse, hate you," Severus' mental voice cut into his musings.

"I know I wouldn't have wanted to see it if it had been you in my place," Orion shot back. "It was nastier than I expected and I'm not overly happy about what we did. I think we could have handled it better."

"If you're worried that you sank to the Death Eaters' level, don't be,"

Severus responded. "You weren't anywhere near it, despite your belief that you were. Death Eaters would have left their victims to die slowly in extreme agony. Your actions I would call creative interrogation, nothing more."

"What about what we did afterwards?" Orion growled.

"Payback. It might be called torture by some but you didn't use any true Dark Arts, nor did you use the Unforgivables apart from that Cruciatus at the start and the Killing Curse at the end. Don't worry; we won't let you turn into what you're fighting."

Orion was silent for a long moment and then he relaxed. "Thanks Sev," he said mentally, and heard his former mentor snort.

"You're welcome, and don't call me Sev," came the reply a few minutes later.

Orion chuckled at that and turned to make his way back down to the main part of the school. He had papers to grade before dinner and after dinner he had Severus' Occlumency lesson. It should be interesting, he thought. Severus had progressed far enough that it was very difficult for Orion to get in, although not impossible. Tonight, he was planning on teaching his son how to direct a Legilimens to the memories he wanted them to see, rather than just keeping them out. It was the first step to what Severus had been so good at in the future – letting a Legilimens rummage round in his mind and see only what Severus wanted them to see. Orion himself had also mastered that particular technique, but there was much more that the current version of Severus had to learn before he reached that level once more.

As he walked past the Room of Requirement, he bumped into Severus, Remus, and James, who all looked surprised to see him and then for a instant, wariness flashed into their eyes and then vanished once more.

"Hello, did you finish your homework this early?" he asked, keeping his tone light, while wondering about that moment of wariness he'd seen.

"Almost, but we were looking for you," Remus said, and Orion frowned. Others might not be able to tell but to him, Remus' body language was screaming his discomfort at being around Orion. Sensing the same discomfort from James and Severus, Orion decided to get to the bottom of it immediately.

"Did you need to talk to me?" he enquired, consciously relaxing his stance and keeping his feelings of worry to himself.

"Well, yes, we did, but," James began, wondering exactly how angry his uncle would be if they admitted that they'd spied on him.

"But what?" Orion prodded.

"Er, can we speak in private?" Severus broke in; his eyes darting nervously round the hall they were standing in. Orion followed his gaze around the hall and then nodded.

"OK. Follow me, we can talk in the Room of Requirement," he said, turning towards the room. James, Severus, and Remus grabbed hold of him and pulled him back.

"NO!" they yelled, almost pulling Orion to the floor as they stumbled backwards.

"What's going on?" Orion asked quietly. He had a suspicion as to why they didn't want him seeing the Room of Requirement, but he desperately hoped he was wrong. Leading them to his office, he warded the door and put up every privacy spell he knew. Conjuring some comfortable chairs, he sat down and stared at his sons and nephew.

"Alright, spill," he said. "Why are you so uncomfortable around me all of a sudden?"

Furtive looks were exchanged between the three boys and Orion waited patiently. If they were uncomfortable around him now, growling at them wouldn't help. His patience was rewarded as James hesitantly spoke up.

"Er, well, we wanted to see what you were like at work, Uncle Orion," he said, and Orion's heart began to sink.

"Yes," he said, hoping that James would continue. He did.

"So, we went to the Room of Requirement, and we got it to have a big screen so we could watch what happened."

"And?" Orion encouraged, not showing the fact that his heart was sinking faster and faster.

James looked up at him, his eyes showing hurt, shock, and bewilderment. "We thought it would be cool, watching what you're like at work, but, it wasn't."

"Yeah, it wasn't fun at all," Remus muttered. "It was as though it wasn't you at all, Dad, but someone else. Why did you torture that guy?"

Orion sighed. "This is precisely why I didn't want to tell you what I do at work. Sometimes, I do have to do things like this, although not usually with my own team members. I'm sorry you had to see it, but I hope you realize that I would never behave that way towards you."

"We know that, Dad, but, well, killing or threatening someone in our defence is different from watching you torture a helpless prisoner," Severus pointed out, trying and failing to hide the small tremble that

had entered his voice. "We were almost sick."

Orion closed his eyes, feeling his own stomach try to return its contents. Firmly telling his stomach to behave, he reopened his eyes and caught the boys' gazes with his own. "It wasn't torture, to be exact," he began. "It might seem that way to outsiders, but the first part of it was interrogation. While I will admit that interrogations aren't usually that brutal, we wanted to find out why he'd killed our friend."

"And the second?" Remus asked accusingly. "What about when you stood there and let your friends curse him without putting a stop to it. I thought you didn't like bullies and yet what we saw looked an awful lot like it."

"Yeah," James chimed in. "We thought we were watching Death Eaters at work, instead of Unspeakables."

Orion felt like he'd been slapped, the accusing stares of his sons and nephew pierced him and wouldn't let him go. "That's why I didn't want you watching it," he snapped once he'd recovered. "In the Unspeakables we tend to handle disciplinary matters within our own teams, or if it's serious, we let our Head of Department handle it. In this matter, he'd deliberately killed another member of the team, and as team leader, it was up to me to deal with it. The only way to deal with it was to kill him, but my other two team members were very close to the one who died, and they needed closure. Letting them show their displeasure the way they did helps them feel as though they've avenged their friend, and then we gave him a quick and painless death. If we'd been Death Eaters, we'd have left him down there alone to die slowly and painfully. I'm sorry you're upset about it, but you shouldn't have tried to spy on us in the first place."

He drew his wand and laid it on the table nearby. "Do I have your permission to cast a spell on you?" he asked coolly.

"What sort of spell?" Severus asked.

"It will lock the information you've learnt about the Unspeakables away in your minds so you can't speak of it to anyone unless I release the spell. It won't harm you; it will merely ensure you can't be forced to reveal it to anyone even if they use Veritaserum or Legilimency."

"Do we have a choice?" Remus queried.

Orion shook his head. "A choice between that or Obliviation, yes. I shouldn't really have told you what I just did about the Unspeakables, but I wanted to explain the reason behind our actions. It wasn't about being bullies, it was about dealing with someone who had betrayed our team and who had killed a friend. It would be similar to, oh, if Sirius killed Remus and then tried to excuse it by saying "It wasn't me that fired the curse, it was someone else." You'd want revenge, wouldn't you; you'd want to hurt him for killing your friend."

The boys exchanged uneasy looks. The example seemed to mirror what had happened, but they weren't comfortable all the same. Finally, James said, "Are you sure that you took no pleasure in it, Uncle Orion? I mean, you seem so different now than you were then."

Orion looked steadily at him. "I took absolutely no pleasure in it, no matter what it looked like. That side of me, the one you saw today, is what I call my dark side. I only let it out when dealing with traitors, or fighting Death Eaters."

"Or Voldemort," Severus put in, and Orion smiled grimly.

"Yes, or him," he confirmed. "I don't let it out except at those times, and I keep it under tight control at all other times. If it scared you, I apologise. I wanted to keep you away from it because I didn't want to upset you, nor did I want you feeling uncomfortable around me. Can you understand that?"

James, Severus, and Remus exchanged another look and then nodded. "Yes," they said in unison.

"Er, we're sorry for spying on you," James said, sounding as hesitant as he had at the beginning.

Orion smiled, and the boys relaxed, knowing that if he was smiling, they couldn't be in too much trouble. "That's OK. I just want to know if you've recovered from seeing my dark side."

"Yeah, I think so," Severus said after a few minutes of silence. "It was just a shock you know. I mean, we know you'd kill to protect us, but seeing something like that, well, we weren't ready for it."

Orion nodded understandingly. "I know. I wasn't ready the first time I got a glimpse of something like what you witnessed today, and it shocked me just as much. Just know this, no matter how much it may have looked cruel, no matter how much it may have looked like we were just a pack of bullies," Remus winced at this, "it was necessary. If I could have, I would have dealt with it at work, but I can't leave Hogwarts now until the year is over." He sighed and continued, "Unfortunately it couldn't wait that long."

He picked up the wand and idly rolled it between his fingers, studying the boys intently. "Are you ready?" he asked.

A few minutes and three spells later, he was being held in the middle of a tight three-way hug. Smiling, he enlarged the chair and relaxed. He didn't doubt that there would be a few nightmares resulting from this incident but at least the initial shock seemed to have worn off and they were bouncing back from it with the resiliency of youth. Suppressing a yawn, he tipped his head back and closed his eyes. It looked as though things would soon be back to normal.

Chapter Thirty-Six: Marauders' Promise and Voldemort Vanishes

Orion kept a careful eye on James, Severus, and Remus following their ill-advised attempt at spying on him. He'd had to deal with a few incidents where all three turned up at his door in the early hours of the morning, shaking with fear and begging him not to kill them, to which he'd raised an eyebrow and said that if he wanted to kill them, he wouldn't do it within the walls of Hogwarts. That said, he'd allowed them to spend those nights with him, and had talked with them the following mornings, working through the issues, which were mostly just a lingering unease about the entire incident and a belief that the Unspeakables as a whole had repressed violent tendencies.

To dispel this ludicrous belief, Orion had decided to invite Reaper and Diamond back to Hogwarts for a casual meeting so the young spies could see for themselves that Unspeakables weren't violent all the time. Orion felt a bit insulted that his sons and his nephew thought that, as they only had to look at him to see that it wasn't true. The easiest time for the meeting was during the Third Task which was a couple of months away. The time in between was so the task could actually be set up, and so that the champions could have a bit of time to recover from the second task and figure out the clue to the third task.

Pulling himself out of his mental woolgathering, Orion unfolded the note which Severus had given him during his recovery from the second task. Frowning, he read the clue again, turning his mind towards solving it. He had time – he'd completed the grading that needed to be done, there were no detentions to oversee, and the Marauders had left him alone, preferring to prank Filch rather than hang around him.

He looked up as his fire flared to life and Professor McGonagall appeared in the fire. "Orion, could you please come to the infirmary. There's a situation that needs your input."

Orion immediately put down the clue and stepped through the fire, managing a graceful exit for once, rather than falling flat on his face. He looked round and saw the Marauders clustered round a bed, all looking very much the worse for wear, but it was the expressions on their faces which pulled him up short. They looked at him with eyes that were a mixture of sadness, shock, disbelief, and anger, before turning their gazes back to the bed.

On the bed was a figure which made Orion's heart clench. Lily lay still and silent, while Poppy worked on her. Bruises were visible on her arms and legs and there was one distinct set on her throat as well.

Looking at the bruises on her legs, he directed a sharp look at Poppy, asking a silent question with his eyes. She shook her head and Orion breathed a silent sigh of relief, even as rage welled up inside him, demanding that he find the one or ones who hurt Lily and make them pay.

"What. Happened." Each word was carefully enunciated as he struggled to control the impulse to kill the ones who had hurt Lily and the rest of his family. He didn't notice, but his spirit family did, that he had included Sirius in his family.

"We're not sure, she wanted to talk to you," McGonagall answered. "She won't talk to anyone else, the Marauders brought her in and they haven't talked either. We were hoping that you could get to the bottom of it."

Orion looked towards Poppy, who nodded, indicating that all the injuries had been documented and healed, and he moved towards the bed, the Marauders drawing back to let him near.

"Lily," he said gently. "Can you tell me what happened?"

The boys looked at Lily, who was trembling and struggling not to cry. "I was, attacked," she whispered, flinching as Orion moved closer.

Seeing this, he stopped and crouched down so he appeared less threatening. The boys shifted position to draw around her and shield her from view, daring Orion to move any further.

"I'm not going to hurt you, Lily," Orion said softly, giving the Marauders a warning look. "I just want to find out what happened that's all."

Lily looked at him from within the protective circle of boys and nodded once. "It started a couple of weeks after the Yule Ball, some older boys began following me, ambushing me as I came out of the library, popping up as I went to classes. I didn't think anything of it at first, but then they got closer, began to "accidentally" push past me, called me names, said that I shouldn't be hanging out with blood traitors and mutts, things like that. I ignored it, because that's what you do with bullies, right? But then, today, they," she trailed off and the trembling, which had started when she'd begun telling the story, increased in strength.

Severus, Remus, and James all sat on the bed and wrapped their arms round her supportively but Orion was inwardly amused to see that Lily chose to use Severus' shoulder as a pillow, even though all three boys were hugging her. He sat down beside the bed, wanting to be closer so he could hear her answers to his next questions.

"What did they do?" Orion asked, he had a fair idea as to what they'd done but he needed Lily to admit it.

Lily looked up at him, her eyes damp and threatening to overflow with tears. "They, they pushed me onto the floor and two of them held me down, then one, touched me." She started to cry and then awkwardly threw her arms around him. As tears soaked into his robe, he hummed a tune under his breath that he used to use with his own Lily whenever she was upset. When the sobs eventually slowed to sniffles, he settled her back on the bed.

"Did they rape you?" he asked with a thread of urgency in his tone.

Lily shook her head, her eyes overflowing with tears once more. "No," she said. "They might have done but then Severus, Remus, James and Sirius crashed in and interrupted them," she waved towards the Marauders.

Orion turned to the Marauders and silently raised an eyebrow. James seemed to be the spokesperson because he answered, "We saw what was happening a few times but Lily said she'd got it under control. We did prank them to try and get them to stop what they were doing, and we did our best never to leave Lily alone but we can't be with her all the time."

"So how did you know she was in trouble today?" Orion queried.

The boys exchanged a glance, and James responded, "We were following her, covertly of course, but we were taken by surprise. Those," he called Lily's attackers a name which had Orion itching to use a Scourgify charm on his mouth, "Stunned us but we were only knocked out briefly because most of the spell hit a pillar we were hiding behind. Remus overcame it really fast and Ennervated the rest of us. Then we heard what sounded like a struggle, and Lily was yelling for someone to stop, and so we burst in. They were in the middle of, er," he blushed to the roots of his hair, but plowed on, "undressing Lily and she didn't want it, so we attacked them."

"And who are they?" Orion enquired.

"We don't know their names but they were seniors," Severus hissed, his eyes alight with malice as he hugged Lily even tighter than before. Lily shifted a bit but didn't protest the tight hug, not even when James and Remus followed Severus' lead.

"What house?" McGonagall asked, having remained silent throughout the questioning so far.

"Two Gryffindors and two Slytherins," Sirius said, his tone telling everyone present what he thought of that. Orion looked at Severus, who nodded, seeming ashamed of the crest he wore on his robe.

"Where are they now?" he asked.

"Probably back in their common rooms," Severus answered. "Dad, er, Professor Potter," he amended, seeing the disapproving look from Professor McGonagall, "what's going to happen now? I mean, we couldn't identify them, so how are you going to know who they are?"

Orion looked thoughtful. "May I view your memory of the event?" he asked. "You don't have to allow this if you don't want it, I won't be upset if you refuse. It's just the easiest way of identifying the attackers."

Severus looked at the other Marauders, before reluctantly nodding. "Will it be through Legilimency or in a Pensieve?" he asked.

"Pensieve," Orion answered, "it will allow more than one person to view the event."

"Who else is going to see it?" Lily interrupted, sounding scared. Orion looked at her and his tone became very gentle.

"Just me, Professor McGonagall, and Professor Dumbledore," he answered. Seeing that Lily looked even more upset at the thought of the Headmaster seeing the humiliating experience, he made her look at him. "Lily," he said softly, "Professor Dumbledore has to see it so that he can say that he's seen conclusive evidence to justify their expulsion. He won't tell anyone about the details, only that you were assaulted. That detail alone is enough."

"What about if they get taken to court?" Lily wasn't calming down, if anything, she was getting more and more agitated.

"They will only be taken to court if you and your parents choose to press charges," Orion answered carefully. "Under the circumstances, we will contact your parents and inform them of the situation. When they get here, you can discuss where you want to go from there."

"First we need to discover who these cowardly excuses for wizards are," McGonagall interrupted, her Scottish accent becoming more pronounced as she grew angrier.

"Leave that to me," Orion growled. He Floored back to his office, grabbed a Pensieve, and Floored back to the infirmary. Sitting down opposite Severus, he locked eyes with his son and quickly slid into his mind. Despite his anger at the situation, he was gentle with his search; Severus didn't deserve to feel the pain that inevitably accompanied an overly rough mental probe. He felt a strong surge of pride as Severus actively helped him, directing his father to the relevant memory and not fighting the withdrawal of said memory. Depositing the silver strand into the bowl, Orion waited for Severus to recover from the slight disorientation which always accompanied memory withdrawal, and then pushed the bowl towards the Headmaster and Deputy Headmistress.

"Lily, are you OK with this?" he asked gently.

Lily had curled up in a ball but she nodded. "It has to be done, just, please, don't think any differently about me when you come out."

Looking quickly at the two other professors, Orion gathered Lily up into a hug once more. "Lily," he said gently yet firmly, "this was not your fault." He tipped her head back a bit so her eyes met his and he consciously let his eyes return to their natural green colour. His expression and tone softened even further. "We are doing this to help you, not to hurt you any further. We won't think any differently of you, we promise. We actually think you're very brave, allowing us to see what happened."

Lily blinked, she could have sworn that Professor Potter's eyes were usually gold but now they were green. She blinked again and they were back to their gold colour. Shaking her head, thinking it must have been a trick of the light, she looked towards Dumbledore and McGonagall, both of whom nodded in agreement with Orion's statement.

"Do it," she said and then burrowed under the bedcovers as Severus, James, and Remus returned to her side, hugging her gently. It was odd, Orion mused as he entered the Pensieve, how Lily could be so accepting of a wizard being near her after what had happened, especially an adult wizard, but then he remembered that for Lily, the Marauders and even he himself represented comfort and safety for her.

The Pensieve memory was hard for all the professors to endure and when they came out, Dumbledore's voice trembled with outrage as he said, "Professor Potter, Professor McGonagall, find those... those pathetic excuses for wizards and bring them to my office. I'll contact Mr and Mrs Evans and bring them to Hogwarts, we will need to consult with them as to whether charges will be brought or not. I will also contact the parents of those other students and get them here too."

Orion and Minerva nodded tightly, but as they moved to the doors of the infirmary, Orion stopped. "Headmaster?" he said casually, "Do you want me to reveal my status to them as a means of shocking them into compliance if they resist?"

"They would know your status as Lord Slytherin from the second task," Dumbledore answered, a bit confused. He was shocked when Orion revealed the second ring on his finger just underneath the Slytherin one.

"You're Lord Gryffindor as well as Lord Slytherin?" he asked,

astonished.

"Yes," Orion said flatly.

Dumbledore smiled coldly. "If they resist, then by all means, pull rank on them, Lord Gryffindor. Call in Horace as well, as the Slytherin Head of House he has the right to be present when the Slytherins are questioned, as Professor McGonagall will be present when the Gryffindors are questioned."

Orion nodded sharply and he and Professor McGonagall left the infirmary. As he went out the door, Orion heard Sirius ask if his parents and James' parents would be called as well. He couldn't hear Dumbledore's answer but he would bet a sizeable amount of galleons that Charles and Emma, and Orion and Walburga Black would not be called in as student fights rarely merited parental involvement unless it was a case of attempted murder. As James and Sirius defended Lily and weren't the ones who attacked her, there was no reason to call in their parents. He smirked as he thought to himself that Professor McGonagall would probably write to them anyway, to inform them of James and Sirius' parts in defending Lily, which Orion would confirm if necessary.

His thoughts turned to the four students that he and Professor McGonagall had been sent to fetch and he snarled, the sound drawing a concerned look from his companion.

"Are you alright, Orion?" she asked.

"No," he admitted. "The thought of what could have happened had the Marauders not come along at precisely the right moment both enrages and scares me. I'm not sure what to do, my impulse is to kill all four of them, but I know I can't do that."

"Kill them, no, scare the hell out of them, yes," McGonagall said with a predatory smile, causing a small moment of consternation in her

colleague. He had known that she would protect her students with the ferocity of a lioness, and he had also known that she was capable of scaring students into submission when necessary – her reaction to Ron Weasley when he'd poisoned him was proof enough – but this predatory side of her nature was starting to scare even him.

"Would this be because it's a previously unknown side of her which you don't know how to react to?" came Severus' mental voice.

"Oh shush," Orion growled back.

"How are you going to deal with it?" Lily asked. The knowledge of what her younger self had been through had shocked all the older Marauders, but Severus and James in particular were furious.

"The Gryffindors should be easy, just snarl at them a few times and they'll roll over and show you their bellies," Severus growled. "They are 'cowardly lions' after all. Can I borrow your body so I can deal with the Slytherins myself?"

Orion snickered at the commentary and said, "No Severus, I can't grant your request, as amusing as it might be to witness. Do you have any other suggestions for how I should deal with the Slytherins?"

"You've just been revealed as Lord Slytherin, the rightful Heir of their House Founder," James said a bit impatiently. "Use that, and your authority as a Hogwarts professor to get to them."

"Good idea, thanks Dad," Orion murmured, thankful that Professor McGonagall hadn't heard him.

"So, how do you want to do this?" McGonagall growled when they reached her office.

Orion shrugged. "I'll get the Slytherins, you get the Gryffindors?"

"I'd rather like you along with me when I get them. Revealing your Lord Gryffindor status may shock them into a confession."

Orion smiled ferally. "Would you like to meet Leo?" he asked.

When he got a confused look from the Head of Gryffindor, he smiled and smoothly transformed into the massive lion nicknamed Leo. Minerva gasped and then came round her desk to crouch beside him. Her fingers gently ran through his mane, and traced the rough fur on his neck. A massive paw was lifted up and she gently pressed the toes to extend his claws.

"Magnificent," she proclaimed as Leo transformed back into Orion. "I've just had a brilliant idea," she said with the same predatory smile that Orion had seen earlier. Orion looked at her uncomprehendingly at first, which transformed into a smirk as she explained.

The Gryffindor students were enjoying their Saturday afternoon, relaxing, or, in the case of the senior students, working on homework. They all looked up as the portrait hole opened and a huge lion leapt into the room, landing in the middle with perfect precision.

The students swallowed as the large cat walked around the room, examining each of them as he went past. The younger students relaxed as the big cat did nothing more than give the lion version of a purr as he passed them, but the seniors were less happy as Leo growled at them. Finally, he came to a stop in front of two sixth year boys, Pritchard and Smith, who gulped as Leo's tail began to lash around in anger and a growl emanated from him which was much more savage than the ones he'd directed at the other seniors.

The lion tapped both of them with a paw and indicated that they should follow him.

"Why should we?" Smith growled, not trusting that Leo wouldn't eat

them.

The lion shivered and transformed back into Orion. "Because I want you to," he growled back. "Professor Dumbledore wants to see you in his office immediately."

"What for?" Pritchard asked.

Orion looked round at the curious Gryffindors who were clustering round him. "He didn't say, all he said was that he wanted to see you."

"Sir," the Head Boy said, breaking the tense silence which had fallen.

"Yes," Orion asked a bit impatiently.

"We heard that Lily Evans was attacked today, the portraits were talking about it. Were these two involved?"

Orion frowned, but he couldn't deny it. "They are alleged to have been involved, yes."

"You can't treat us like this!" Smith suddenly growled, interrupting the murmurs that had arisen after Orion's statement. He glared at Orion and snarled, "What gives you the right to come in and do this? You're Lord Slytherin, why would you care about a mudblood like Evans anyway?"

Orion let the Gryffindor ring shimmer into existence on his finger. "I inherited the title of Lord Slytherin from my mother's side," he said quietly, his voice practically shaking with anger, "but from my father's side, I inherited the title of Lord Gryffindor. So I would suggest that you stay silent, Smith, unless you want to be dragged to Dumbledore's office by Leo."

The watching students all gasped at this new nugget of information, and one brave second year asked, "Sir? Um, will you announce that

at the same time as you announce that you're Lord Slytherin?"

Orion looked down at the young witch, and smiled faintly. "I'm not sure, I'd need to discuss it with Professor Dumbledore first."

Turning back to Pritchard and his partner in crime, Smith, who were now both looking alternately resentful and defiant, he said icily, "If you ever use the word "mudblood," in my presence again, you will regret it. I won't have it, and I don't believe Professor McGonagall allows such derogatory language towards members of her House either. Come with me now."

"Er, Lord Gryffindor?" The Head Girl spoke up, her eyes full of disgust as she looked at the two sixth-year Gryffindors who had disgraced their House. Orion turned to her enquiringly and she swallowed but continued, "Is Lily going to be OK? Her friends aren't here either, are they alright?"

Orion looked at her piercingly for a moment and then said, "She's understandably very upset and it's for that reason that Madam Pomfrey has restricted visitors to just her friends and family for now, apart from staff members. She will need support when she returns, but don't crowd her or press her for answers if she doesn't want to talk. Her friends are with her, and they're alright, just a bit shaken up."

He swept the common room with a sharp gaze. "No one is to mention this to anyone else is that understood? The details of what happened today are to remain private and if any staff member hears one whisper of what happened on the student grapevine then Professor McGonagall and I will find out who's responsible for the leak and we will personally see to it that the punishment is severe. Am I understood?"

The suddenly pale group of students nodded silently as Orion led the two sixth-years out of the common room, looking very grim. Behind him, he left a silence in which you could have heard a pin drop.

As they reached the main hall, they met Professor McGonagall, who took one look at the expression on Orion's face and smirked. "Did you leave any of my cubs alive, Lord Gryffindor?" she asked.

"Would you be upset if I said no?" Orion asked with a malicious smile.

McGonagall looked at him reproachfully, and he shrugged. "Yes, they're alive. They're annoyed with these two because they heard what had happened from the portraits and I couldn't deny it. They won't say anything; I might have threatened them with unspecified but severe punishments if any of the teachers heard a whisper of speculation or gossip on the matter."

McGonagall chuckled and then fixed the two students behind Orion with her sternest look. "Do you wish to get the Slytherins while I escort these two up to the Headmaster?" she asked.

Orion nodded. "It would be my pleasure," he hissed.

Salazar Slytherin was enjoying a talk with Godric Gryffindor when one of the knights from another portrait ran up to them. "Lord Slytherin, Professor Potter just went past my portrait, heading for the Slytherin common room. He looked like he was contemplating murdering one or more of the students there. You need to go, now!"

"We'll finish our talk later," Salazar said hurriedly before racing to his portrait which was just outside the common room. Godric watched him go and sighed, it was a pity that history made them out to be enemies when they were really best friends. It made having a friendly conversation very difficult as they had to pretend to hate each other whenever they were in public.

"Heir, wait," Salazar called out as he skidded into his portrait.

Orion stopped abruptly. "Salazar," he growled, "how are you?"

"I'm fine, but you look as though you're about to kill someone. What's got you in such a temper?"

Orion breathed slowly and deeply for a couple of minutes, reasserting his emotional control. When he felt that he was sufficiently calm enough to explain the situation, he turned to his ancestor with a disturbingly blank expression on his face.

"Two sixth-year boys from Slytherin sexually assaulted a third-year Gryffindor witch today. If her friends hadn't stopped them in time, they would be facing a charge of rape, rather than just attempted rape."

Salazar lapsed into Parseltongue as he hissed a long string of swear words. "How dare they!" the Founder growled when he'd regained control of his temper. "Was it just them?"

Orion shook his head. "No, could you get Godric for me? Two sixth year Gryffindors were also involved."

Salazar shook his head in disbelief. "He will be furious. Please tell me that you and Minerva dealt with them appropriately."

Orion nodded and quickly explained what he and McGonagall had done. Salazar chuckled, and gained permission from Orion to tell Godric what had happened. "Go get those treacherous little snakes and get them out of Hogwarts!" he said just before he left.

"Don't worry, I will," Orion responded.

As much fun as turning into Leo and terrifying the two Gryffindors had been, Orion knew he had to be more subtle with the Slytherins. As he stepped into the common room, the students nearest the door noticed him and in seconds, every Slytherin student who was in the common room or dormitory was clustered into the available space.

Orion repressed a sigh; he'd hoped to quietly extract the two boys from the common room without catching the attention of every other student in the room. It looked like that plan was now completely unworkable.

"Oh well, when a quiet extraction is unworkable, go for public withdrawal and make them seem like the villains they are," he murmured to himself before looking round the common room, trying to pinpoint where his targets were.

"Lord Slytherin, it's an honor," Theodore Nott said eagerly, not quite fawning over Orion but coming close to it.

"Stand back idiot, can't you see he doesn't want you licking his boots," Lucius Malfoy hissed impatiently, before bowing to Orion and saying, "Lord Slytherin, welcome to the Slytherin common room."

"Thank you, Mr Malfoy," Orion said coolly. "I'm looking for Mr Donovan and Mr Goshawk. Are they here?"

"They're over there, sir," Lucius turned and indicated where the two aforementioned students were sitting.

"Thank you," Orion murmured, before raising his voice. "Will you two come over here please; I need to talk to you."

The boys looked at each other but walked over to him, apparently unconcerned about the fact that one of their professors who also happened to be Lord Slytherin wanted to talk to them. When they reached him, Orion stared at them, not saying anything for a minute, and then he said, "Come with me, I need to speak to you in private." He led the way out of the common room, and Donovan and Goshawk followed him, both confused.

Once outside in the hall, Orion cast a privacy spell and said, "The Headmaster sent me to fetch you. He requires your presence in his

office, immediately."

The two students looked confused and Donovan said, "Why does the Headmaster need to see us, sir?"

"He said that it was in regard to a sexual assault on a third-year Gryffindor," Orion said coldly.

Donovan and Goshawk looked at each other and then back at him, neither saying anything to either confirm or deny their guilt. Orion narrowed his eyes, but turned and began leading them towards Dumbledore's office. As he walked ahead of them, he kept his senses on full alert. He wouldn't put it past these two to attack him from behind, they didn't seem at all concerned over the potential trouble they were in, and he didn't want to think what either version of Severus would say if they found out that he allowed himself to be attacked by two students.

It was at the second staircase when the half-expected attack occurred. Orion felt a movement of air behind him and then felt two sets of hands attempt to push him over the stair rail. He twisted his body so he was facing the two students and almost lost an eye as both students had their wands pointed straight at him.

"We're not going any further," Goshawk snarled.

"Yeah, the mudblood bitch deserved it," Donovan added, moving closer to try and shove Orion over the edge. Orion slid out of the way, moving a step up and then stepped down again so he was behind Donovan. He felt a flare of magic nearby and jerked aside, letting an organ rotting curse fly by him and impact the wall. Seconds later, he'd stuck Goshawk to the wall with a Sticking charm and taken his wand from him. Donovan stumbled forward, thrown off balance by Orion's unexpected movement and almost took a headfirst dive to the ground floor himself. Orion sighed, grabbed the Slytherin by the scruff of his neck and pulled him back to safety, sticking him to the

wall beside Goshawk so he wouldn't go anywhere. Once that was done, he pocketed Donovan's wand, putting it beside Goshawk's.

"Oy, let me up, I'm going to fall," Donovan yelled, still thinking that he was about to fall over the stair rail.

"Quit whining, you're back on safe ground," Orion snapped. As Donovan processed the fact that he was stuck to the wall, Orion quickly asked the mental version of Severus whether he'd handled the situation correctly. Finding that the former Head of Slytherin approved of his actions, and in fact suggested that he could have done something a lot more drastic if he'd wanted to, Orion relaxed. Turning to the two Slytherins, he eyed them with a mixture of contempt and anger.

"That was very, very stupid," he growled, "and not at all what I would have expected from two senior Slytherins. In addition to the original charge that you're already facing, you have just now added attacking a Hogwarts professor to that." He silenced Goshawk with a flick of his wand as he continued, "A good lawyer could make a case that your attack on me was attempted murder. Do you really want to stand up in front of the Wizengamot on that sort of charge?"

Goshawk sneered at him, still apparently unaffected by what had happened, but Donovan shook his head, all his previous defiance and cockiness gone. He'd tried attacking the one teacher he should have known better than to attack, and had paid for it. Professor Potter had moved so fast he'd barely seen the movement, and he'd got the scare of his life when he felt himself falling over the rail, only to be pulled back by a strong hand which had closed over the back of his neck. He swallowed hard as he remembered that the man who was currently looking at him with an expression of utter contempt was not only one of his professors, but also Lord Slytherin.

"What was that?" Orion asked, deliberately mimicking the older Severus' silky tone, the one he reserved for students that he

considered particularly dimwitted.

"No, we don't want to face a charge of attempted murder," Donovan said weakly. He swallowed and added after a minute, in a very small voice, "Lord Slytherin."

Orion's expression didn't alter one iota, and Donovan felt about one inch tall. With a flick of his wand, the students were free, but Orion immediately Petrified Goshawk. He didn't trust him not to try another attack. "Walk ahead of me," he said, and Donovan complied silently. Goshawk was levitated along beside him and the rest of the trip to Dumbledore's office was completed in silence.

When they arrived, it was a very subdued pair of Slytherins who entered, Orion having unPetrified Goshawk just prior to entry. The sixteen-year-olds went even paler than they already were when they spotted their parents sitting in the office, along with the Pritchards, the Smiths, and the Evans'.

Lily, and the Marauders were all there as well, along with Professors McGonagall and Slughorn, while Dumbledore was standing behind his desk, the usual twinkle notably absent, having been replaced with a cold fury which made Orion secretly glad that it wasn't him that Dumbledore was glaring at.

"We will now begin by hearing what happened earlier today," Dumbledore said curtly. "Miss Evans, as the victim in this distressing affair, perhaps you could start off?"

Lily jumped, but with her parents' support, she retold the tale, and by the end she was shivering violently. Rose was hugging her tightly while Daniel looked as though he'd love to strangle the four boys who had hurt his daughter. They remained silent though, in the interests of learning why this had happened.

"Mr Smith, Mr Pritchard, perhaps you'd like to explain why you, as

senior Gryffindors, would attack a younger member of your own House in such a vile manner." Dumbledore wasn't letting up, his tone was cold and the words were clipped and precise.

The two boys didn't answer at first, but Orion's low growl coupled with growls from their fathers forced them to answer. "She's a know-it-all and she hangs round with blood traitors and mutts. The third years might not realize it but we know Remus' little secret!" Pritchard spat, glaring at Remus, who snarled in response, his eyes glowing amber.

"Remus," Orion said, putting a hand on his shoulder in both comfort and warning. Remus' growls subsided but he continued to glare at the senior Gryffindors. James, Sirius and Severus drew closer to him, showing silent support though it was hardly needed.

"What secret is that?" Mrs Smith inquired.

"That he's a werewolf," her son answered.

"He isn't the one we're here to discuss," Dumbledore interrupted, "and no matter your feelings about him, it doesn't excuse your assault on Miss Evans. He has hurt no one in his three years here so you can't use his unfortunate condition as an excuse for hurting one of his friends."

"That's perfectly correct," Mr Pritchard agreed, glaring at his son, who wilted under the ferocity of it.

"What excuse do you have for your actions towards Miss Evans," Dumbledore said, looking towards the Slytherins.

"The same as theirs," Donovan said reluctantly. "They got her into the room, and we joined in from there."

The tension level in the room skyrocketed as Donovan finished

speaking. With a glance towards Lily, Mr Smith said, "Is there any evidence to support these allegations apart from the word of five students who are all friends and three of whom belong to the same family."

As the Marauders tensed, prepared to yell at the man for doubting them, Professor McGonagall stepped in. "Yes there is, I'm afraid," she said crisply. "I saw it with my own eyes. There is also documented medical evidence that our mediwitch, Madam Pomfrey, collected. Do you need to see it?"

Looking slightly more apologetic, Mr Goshawk said, "It would help make it more believable, yes. I'm sorry, Miss Evans, but we do need to know that this allegation is based on fact, rather than a clever hoax."

Dumbledore looked towards Lily and her parents. Rose and Daniel looked annoyed that Mr Pritchard was questioning their daughter's credibility while Lily looked like she was praying for the floor to open up and swallow her. It was obvious that she wasn't happy at the prospect of even more people seeing what had happened to her.

"Perhaps a less public venue?" Professor McGonagall suggested.

"Or use Veritaserum," Professor Slughorn put in. "The alleged culprits are old enough for the standard dose to not affect them."

"That would require parental consent," Dumbledore said delicately, looking towards the four sets of parents involved.

The Pritchards, Smiths, Goshawks, and Donovans looked at each other, and then at Lily and her parents. "You have it," they said.

Slughorn quickly left to get the Veritaserum and when he returned, the four senior students had been sat down in chairs and restrained in preparation for the interrogation.

"Miss Evans, do we have your consent to play the memory of what happened to you, before we administer the Veritaserum?" Dumbledore asked.

Lily slowly looked around at everyone in the room. Finally, her eyes came to rest on Orion, and once more, she blinked as she saw his eyes flicker from gold to green and then back again. Looking back to Dumbledore, she swallowed hard and then nodded.

The Headmaster nodded and set out Orion's Pensieve on the table. Tapping the side with his wand, the memory began to play. Lily turned away, unable to watch, but the other people present in the room were unable to tear their eyes away from it, no matter how disturbing they found the memory to be.

When it was over, Mr Smith approached Lily and stopped when he was a few feet from her. Daniel began to rise from his chair, unsure of the wizard's motives but when the man knelt in front of Lily and made no move to harm her, he relaxed.

"Miss Evans, on behalf of myself and my wife, may I offer my deepest apologies for our son's actions toward you. It was despicable and completely intolerable. You can be sure that we'll deal with this appropriately, and we won't breathe a word of it to anyone else. You won't find it splashed all over the media, we promise."

Lily looked uncertainly at him and then nodded faintly.

"Well," Dumbledore said, as Mr Smith went to stand beside his wife, "shall we continue with the Veritaserum just to lay to rest the inevitable argument that the memory could have been faked?"

"We'll need an Auror to administer the Veritaserum," Slughorn said, his eyes darting round the room.

"I can get one if you want," Orion offered.

Dumbledore nodded, and one Floo call later, Amelia Bones was in the office. After a quick explanation of the situation, she took charge with her usual efficiency. The Veritaserum was administered and the results of the interrogation shocked everyone present.

As the antidote was administered, the silence in the room following the end of the interrogation was suddenly broken. "You are disgusting!" Mr Donovan snapped, glaring at his son with all the venom he could muster. "How could you do that? We didn't raise you to think like a Death Eater, nor did we raise you to behave like one!"

"Dad," Donovan said weakly. "It wasn't me, I swear!"

"How can you deny the evidence that was right in front of all of us?" his mother demanded, as incensed as her husband. "Are you saying that you lied while under the influence of Veritaserum? If it weren't for the fact that you're our only child, we would disown you!"

Similar conversations were happening between the Smiths, Goshawks, and Pritchards. The others in the room sat back and watched as the four boys were told in no uncertain terms that their actions were not condoned in the slightest, nor would their parents protect them from the consequences.

"I thought that parents of Slytherins wouldn't care about something like this," Daniel whispered to Orion, his comment unheard in the general shouting that was now occurring.

"Not all Slytherins are pureblood supremacists, and neither are their parents. Even the ones that are wouldn't condone something like this," Orion murmured back. "Rape in the magical world is very rare, and the penalties are very harsh. Attempted rape is treated as severely as actual rape itself, both because the number of attempts

is so low and because the government wants to make an example of anyone who is convicted of this repulsive crime. Even most of the Death Eaters wouldn't do this – only the truly insane and sickest of them would use rape as a weapon."

Daniel nodded thoughtfully and then looked up at Dumbledore, who was waiting for the noise to die down. "Professor Dumbledore, what will happen now?" he asked, holding Lily tightly as she shivered, close to completely breaking down. Her magic sparked and flared erratically as she struggled to calm herself, accidentally shocking her father in the process.

The question had the desired effect of shutting up the furious parents who were still finding new ways to describe their opinion of their respective offspring's actions. Dumbledore looked very old as he said "Now it's up to you. Do you want to press charges?"

"Yes," Daniel and Rose answered immediately.

"Well, in that case, there are some things to consider. First of all, we should deal with the school aspect of this. Is there anything else that needs to be added before I make my decision?"

Donovan looked at Orion fearfully, while Goshawk merely looked sullen and defiant. Orion sighed, internally debating whether he should tell Dumbledore about the attack on the way up to his office.

"YES!" his spirit family yelled in his head.

"I have something to add," he said.

"What?" Dumbledore asked.

"On the way up here, Mr Donovan and Mr Goshawk tried to push me over the stair rail. I disarmed and subdued them, but it wasn't a pleasant experience. I just wished to let you know about their attack

on one of your professors."

This statement brought growls of outrage from the Donovans and Goshawks. "Do you want that proven as well?" Orion asked mildly, and when the answer was yes, he wordlessly pulled the memory from his mind and dropped it into the Pensieve, beginning from when he'd gone to collect them from the Slytherin common room.

"This is unbelievable," Mr Donovan muttered. "I'm so sorry Professor Potter," he said, holding out his hand.

Orion shook it and said "No apology necessary, it's not you I'm annoyed with. I wouldn't have brought it up except I think that if they could attack a professor, what else might they be tempted to do."

"I've seen enough," Dumbledore said, drawing all eyes towards him. Eyeing the four subdued sixth-years sternly, he said, "You attempted to rape a young witch, you used offensive magic against four other younger students, and lastly, you, Mr Donovan and Mr Goshawk, attacked Professor Potter in a manner that a clever lawyer might be able to call attempted murder. Given the evidence I've both heard and seen, I can only in good conscience, make one decision."

Drawing himself up, he glared at the boys in front of him and said, "Mr Pritchard, Mr Smith, Mr Donovan and Mr Goshawk. For your crimes against Miss Evans, there is only one sentence I can pass. As of now, effective immediately, you four are expelled from Hogwarts. Please hand over your wands."

The boys could only stand and watch in helpless shock and pain as their wands were snapped in front of them. "Your parents will be allowed to take you home, but you will be charged with the attempted rape of Miss Evans."

As they nodded glumly, Dumbledore looked towards Orion. "Professor Potter, will you be pressing charges for the attack against

you by Mr Goshawk and Mr Donovan?"

Orion looked at the boys in question and slowly nodded. "Yes, I think so. It was a separate attack, and should be treated as such."

Dumbledore nodded gravely. "Very well. Mr Goshawk and Mr Donovan, you will also be charged with the attack on Professor Potter. You had best hope it is merely an assault charge, rather than attempted murder." As the dejected former sixth-years were led away by their fuming parents, Dumbledore looked over at the Marauders, who had been silent throughout the entire meeting.

"Messrs Potter, and Mr Black, you have earned Gryffindor and Slytherin sixty points each for your courageous defence of Miss Evans. Miss Evans, if you need counseling for this terrible incident, the school will provide it free of charge. You only need to tell us if you need it."

Lily nodded and shakily stood up. "Thank you, Professor Dumbledore. May I and my parents leave now? We want to discuss our options with Professor Potter."

"Of course," Dumbledore said gently, as Professor McGonagall moved forward and put a hand on Lily's shoulder.

"I'm truly sorry that I didn't see what was happening," she said softly.

"We know, and we don't blame you," Rose answered.

Later that afternoon, after a brief discussion and arranging to meet later the following week to hire a lawyer, Orion was the recipient of an unusual visit. The Marauders and Lily turned up at his office, all looking solemn.

"Dad, we want to ask you something," Remus said as they sat down.

"Alright," Orion said agreeably. "What do you want to know?"

"We want you to be our anchor for a protection ritual," Sirius said.

Orion frowned. "No," he said.

"Why not?" Severus asked.

"Because," Orion said sternly, "even the most basic of rituals can have side effects if not done properly, and the protection rituals are all complex. Many of those rituals also require the participants to willingly share blood with each other, both as a sign of trust, and also to enhance the magic in the ritual. If done wrong, if even one person involved isn't doing it of their own free will, then the magic can backlash, killing all the participants."

He broke off and locked eyes with all the Marauders in turn, including Lily. "I want all of you to promise me, here and now, that you will not think of, nor research, nor attempt, any sort of magical ritual, protection or otherwise. Rituals should only be attempted by adult witches and wizards who fully understand what they're getting into, and understand the risks involved."

"But, we want to protect each other, and this ritual is the only one we've found that works the way we want it to," James protested.

"What exactly do you want to do?" Orion asked, wondering if they were trying to achieve their desired effect with a complex ritual when a simple spell might do the same thing.

"We want a spell which will allow each of us to sense when another of us is in trouble, and also give us a sense of their location. We also want to be able to use it to send messages to each other, to arrange meetings after classes and things like that," Lily explained, hoping that Orion would relent. He'd never, to her knowledge, denied them anything with such finality before.

"You're going about this in the wrong way," Orion said as he thought of ways to achieve what the Marauders wanted. They looked at him with confusion and he continued, "You don't need an elaborate ritual to do what you want. All you need is a couple of spells. Go and do more research with that in mind and you should find what you need. Once you've found the required spells, come back and I'll help you set it up."

As they rose to leave, Orion coughed sharply. "Aren't you forgetting something?" he asked.

"What?" James said.

"The promise," Orion said. "I won't let you leave without all of you, separately, promising me that you won't think about doing any rituals, or even research them. It's too dangerous a subject to play around with, especially at your age."

Reluctantly, all the Marauders, and Lily, gave their word that they wouldn't look further into magical rituals, and then left, keen to research protection spells. Orion watched them leave, trying to ignore a nagging doubt that they hadn't been quite as sincere as they should have been with regards to the promise they'd made. Closing his eyes, he decided to visit Godric's Hollow, having not been there for a while.

No sooner had he sat down on the couch and accepted hugs from his spirit family, James was trying to convince him to stop doubting the younger Marauders. "They won't break their word," he said reassuringly.

"I want to believe that but I have a really bad feeling about this," Orion said. Spotting the outrage on Severus and Remus' faces, he snorted.

"Come on, how often did you have a student promise they wouldn't do something, only for them to turn round and do it anyway. Particularly if it was a subject they were strongly interested in."

"Not as many times as you might think," Severus growled back. "Let them be, I'm sure that Lily won't allow them to go back on their promise, even if they did get it into their heads to ignore your warning."

Orion nodded reluctantly. "I'll believe that at least. I guess I'm just more wary about trusting them ever since your younger selves," he looked at James, Severus and Remus, "decided to try spying on me. I didn't punish them for it because I felt that the shock of seeing the interrogation and execution was punishment enough. It's put a serious dent in their eagerness to pry into my private life at any rate, which is a good thing."

"Yes, but that was a mistake brought about by youthful curiosity and it didn't put their lives in danger," Sirius said. "A mistake, might I add that they've paid for and one you've forgiven them for. This is different. They won't break their promise. If they do then you can punish them as harshly as you feel is necessary."

"I might not have to," Orion growled. "The consequences of messing up a ritual, even a minor one..." he trailed off as his family nodded silently. They all knew what he was talking about and they hoped that their younger versions heeded Orion's advice and kept their promise.

Orion stepped up his covert surveillance of the Marauders, extending it to include Sirius and Lily while they did their research. He slowly relaxed as he saw that they were keeping their promise about ritual research and decided that they didn't need him spying on them, so he removed his surveillance in several stages. Two weeks after the attack on Lily and the unusual request by the Marauders, Charles contacted Orion with some news which made the Unspeakable want to bang his head against the wall and then Avada Kedavra

everything around him.

"Orion," Charles said with a worried expression, "Voldemort has disappeared."

Chapter Thirty-Seven: Voldemort's Escape and Marauder Theories

Professor McGonagall was extremely annoyed. Someone had filled her private quarters with catnip and transfigured her into her animagus form for three hours. The Marauders, notorious pranksters though they were, wouldn't be able to get into her quarters, which left only the staff as suspects. And there was only one staff member with the Marauders' love of pranks.

Orion Potter.

Where was he though? She'd checked his usual haunts, the staff room, his own quarters, the Room of Requirement, outside by the lake. He wasn't anywhere to be found. Shifting into her tabby cat form again, she sniffed the air and caught a familiar scent. Ah ha. Following it up a flight of stairs, she came to a stop in front of the girl's bathroom inhabited by Moaning Myrtle.

'Why would he be going into a girl's bathroom,' the cat thought, before a loud grinding noise drew her attention. Quickly shifting back to human form, she made herself invisible and peered round the door.

The sinks had moved away to form a large hole in the floor. As she watched, Orion climbed out of the hole and dusted himself off. He looked around and quietly hissed a command in Parseltongue. McGonagall shivered as the sinks moved back into their usual positions. She liked and respected her colleague and he was doing a lot to improve the relationship between the Gryffindors and the Slytherins, largely due to his unique position as both Lord Gryffindor and Lord Slytherin. Still, she wasn't quite used to his casual use of Parseltongue. She'd come across him having a conversation with Salazar Slytherin once, discussing something in Parseltongue. When she'd asked them what they were discussing, Orion had responded that they'd been talking about the recent weather. Both he and Salazar had laughed when she'd commented that she'd never heard

a discussion of the weather sound so evil, and Orion had responded that it might sound evil but in reality it was just the way the language was, and he couldn't change that.

"Hello Professor Potter," she said as he exited the bathroom, and almost fainted when a wand came to rest right between her eyes.

"Oh, sorry Minerva," Orion said as he slid his wand back into the sheath on his arm. "Did you want to see me?"

"Yes, I did," McGonagall responded rather huffily. "You wouldn't happen to know who filled my quarters with catnip and transfigured me into my tabby cat form for the past few hours, would you?"

Orion chuckled. "Now who would have the nerve to do something like that," he teased.

"Orion," McGonagall said.

Recognising her tone, Orion held up his hands in surrender. "OK, I admit it, it was me," he said. "I needed some more practice at getting into a warded area, and yours are best wards I know apart from Albus'. At least here, anyway."

"Why not get him then?" McGonagall said, still a bit annoyed but relaxing now that she knew it wasn't purely a prank.

"Because I didn't want to have to destroy the gargoyle," Orion admitted, bringing a reluctant chuckle from McGonagall.

"Well, it was a good prank, I'll admit that," she said, and Orion relaxed. He'd read the manual that all new teachers were given, but nowhere did it mention what could happen to teachers who pranked senior staff members. The answer was, apparently, nothing.

As they walked towards the staff room, Orion unfolded the clue again.

He frowned as he read it for what seemed like the thousandth time. It was proving annoyingly resistant to interpretation.

To find the treasure you seek,

In history, you must look.

Dangerous challenges lie ahead

Tests of skill and tests of knowledge to be passed

The start is underground, in a place of myth

Where the first challenge is triumphing over a gaze of death

Orion snorted as he walked beside McGonagall, wondering when he could reasonably return to the Chamber of Secrets. He needed peace and quiet to work on this clue. Suddenly his eyes widened, and he looked at the last two lines.

"Place of myth, gaze of death? Oh that's very clever," he chuckled, certain that he'd found the start of the task. The rest of it was less clear. He did wonder, privately, how the organizers intended to open the Chamber, and then wondered if they were going to reconstruct a version of the Chamber for the task. McGonagall gave him an odd look but saw the parchment in his hand and remained silent, correctly deducing that he was trying to work out the clue for the next task.

"Probably," a voice floated through his mind.

"Sirius?" Orion asked, making sure to keep his end of the conversation purely within his mind. He didn't want Minerva thinking that he was going crazy.

"Yes, pup, it's me," Sirius said with a laugh. "Were you expecting someone else?"

"No, just that usually it's Dad or Sev that talks to me unexpectedly like this. What's up?"

"Nothing, just amused at your reasoning for the clue being what it is"

"Uh huh and exactly when do you think I was born?" Orion enquired sarcastically. "Since you interrupted my perfectly good logical deductions, do you have a theory on the rest of the clue?"

Sirius was silent for a while and then said, "It seems fairly straightforward. Pass several tests of knowledge and skill and gain the prize at the end."

Orion smiled. "True, but then, it might be too obvious."

He heard a familiar snort before Severus said, "Remember, Harry, not all wizards are as good at logical reasoning as you are. Something like this, they'd have to research it, or they'd spend ages thinking in circles and usually getting the wrong answer."

Now Orion chuckled. Severus' words, while slightly cruel, were right. "Alright, so if we accept that I have to take the clue at face value, what does the rest of it mean?"

"I think it means you need to start learning magical history again, and learning it properly," Remus interjected. At Orion's groan, he chuckled and continued, "No, listen, the clue says that you need to look in history to find the answers. The tests, I'm willing to bet are either tests of intelligence, or physical challenges. It's probably a mixture of both, given the wording of the clue. I'd sound out Albus on how they intend to open the Chamber, or if they intend to open it at all, the task might start in the dungeons."

"Yeah, in Potions class," Orion snorted. He was unable to repress a laugh at the thought of a ghostly version of Severus glaring at all the

champions.

"I heard that," Severus said, and Orion laughed harder.

"You have to admit," he said once he'd regained control of himself, "that it would be a perfectly logical deduction."

"If you were in your original time, yes it would be, but not here," Severus said, and Orion got the distinct impression that Severus was scowling at him. "In this time," his former mentor continued, "it would be wise to take the clue at face value, at least for the starting point, and assume that it's the Chamber of Secrets. As to how they intend to open it, maybe they will construct a version of it for the task, the same as they did for Azkaban in the second task."

"Mhm. Of course, it could be meaning that we start in a gigantic cave with a young basilisk," Orion replied.

"Yes, well, stop worrying about it. You'll find out what it is later, I'm sure," James said, ending the debate. Acquiescing to his father's wish, Orion entered the staff room with Professor McGonagall. Further study of the clue would have to wait until later.

A pleasant half hour of relaxation and conversation followed, as Orion and Professor McGonagall discussed various topics, ranging from who they thought would win the House Cup, to who might win the upcoming election and become Minister of Magic. As the conversation was winding down, Orion felt a tingle of magic surround him and gave McGonagall a sharp look.

"Relax," she said calmly. "It's Hogwarts, reaffirming your right to be here. It periodically renews its bond with all the teachers. The magic usually isn't noticed, but because you're an Heir of two of the Founders, it will bond more strongly with you."

"Does that mean I can't leave?" Orion asked.

"No, you can leave. The castle won't force you to stay. When a teacher leaves, their bond with the castle will dissolve, again mostly unnoticed, but I don't think yours will because you're an Heir."

Orion nodded, and examined the magic that had surrounded him. It was the castle's magic, and it did feel like it was welcoming him home. Smiling, he thought to himself that he really should track down the portrait of all four of the Founders. He needed some advice from them.

Standing up, he looked down at McGonagall and said, "I'm sorry to leave but I have to go and make a Floo call. I need to discuss something with Charles."

"What?"

"Voldemort escaped last night, I need to find out how, and also work out a plan for recapturing him," Orion said with a scowl.

"Why did you not transfigure him into an inanimate object at the start?"

"Because I was tired, sore, and didn't have the necessary focus to do more than shrink him," Orion growled back.

McGonagall blinked. "Oh. Well, that would be an acceptable reason. Can I talk to you later?"

Orion gave her an odd look, and then answered, "Yes of course. Come to my quarters when you're free and we'll talk."

McGonagall nodded and Orion hurried off. He needed to make a Floo call.

Reaching his quarters, he warded the door as tightly as he knew how,

which was quite tightly, and put up the strongest privacy wards he knew. Once the room was as secure as he could make it, he threw a handful of Floo powder in the fire. "Potter Manor," he said clearly.

Emma answered the call and broke out into a relieved smile when she saw him. "How are you?" she said.

"I'm fine. How are you and where's Charles?" Orion asked, his worry for his grandparents overriding his concern about Voldemort's whereabouts. He also wondered why he hadn't felt anything when the Dark Lord had broken free. Surely he'd have felt Voldemort's elation over breaking out of his potions vial prison.

"Charles is in the study, trying to work out how the pesky mini-Dark Lord escaped," Emma replied. "We were hoping you could use your investigative skills to solve the mystery."

Orion nodded thoughtfully. "Let me through and I'll do my best to work it out," he said.

Emma stood back and Orion immediately went through the fire, staying still until he'd stopped spinning. Exiting gracefully, he was greeted by a rib-crushing hug from his grandmother. As soon as she let him go, Orion was engulfed in another, equally strong hug from his grandfather.

"I'm so sorry, one minute he was there, the next, he was gone," Charles said, running a hand through his hair in frustration. Orion blinked as the gesture registered in his brain, and he grinned as he realised that obviously it wasn't only genes that could be passed down through generations.

"That's fine; he's a slippery little bastard anyway. It's not your fault," he said reassuringly, before slipping into Unspeakable mode. "Can you tell me what happened just before he disappeared? Everything, what you did, what he did and anything you can think of, no matter

how small it is."

Charles and Emma sat down in the lounge. Orion sat opposite them, his wand held loosely between his thumb and forefinger. Silence reigned in the room as Charles and Emma were reviewing the events of the previous evening and Orion didn't want to interrupt their memory recall with questions.

"We fed him," Charles said slowly, "at seven, when we had our own dinner. He seemed in a better mood than usual, but we thought it was because it was dinner time. He did perk up more around meals so we didn't think anything of it."

"Then what," Orion prodded carefully.

"After we'd fed him, we ate our own dinner. It happened during the meal. We heard a crash, and ran into the lounge. He'd managed to somehow Apparate out of the vial. The Apparition broke through the charms you put on it. We ran into the lounge and saw him standing there. He was very tired, I think, because he just glared at us and then Apparated away."

"He was the size of an action figure, how could he possibly escape you even if he managed to get out of the vial?" Orion demanded.

"He managed to somehow resize himself as well, so it wasn't as though we were chasing a toy version of him," Charles said pointedly.

Sighing, Orion acknowledged the point and examined the glass vial which was lying on the floor where Voldemort had left it after he'd Apparated out of it. Flicking his wand, he levitated it, and swiftly cast some highly complicated diagnostic charms on it. Frowning, he redid the tests, and then stood up.

"I need to consult some texts and possibly some medical people too,

but I think I know what happened. Before I go, may I ask you something?"

"Of course," Charles said. "What do you want to know?"

"When I bound his magic, and removed his Slytherin blood-gifts, it didn't remove his magic entirely. All it did was bind it. Is it possible that he could have done something similar to the accidental magic that all magical children experience before they start school?"

"You reduced him to the level of a Squib though. How could it have built up?" Charles said, frowning thoughtfully.

"Squibs don't have much magic to begin with," Emma pointed out. "What you did, Orion, was to take an adult wizard and bind his magic so that he couldn't access it. Essentially you forced a large amount of magic into a small space. All he'd have to do would be wait for it to build up to a sufficient level and use it. It would be like putting the lid on a pot of boiling water, sooner or later the buildup of steam would make the lid fly off the top."

"So what you're saying is that it was inevitable?" Orion demanded, feeling utterly furious with himself for not realizing that this situation could occur and taking steps to prevent it.

"Maybe and maybe not, but the point is, what do we do now?" Emma said, trying to stop the atmosphere from becoming too tense.

Orion sighed. "First, we put some ultra-strong wards round this house, Voldemort won't be happy with any of us, and he knows some facts about us which would make us prime targets for him."

"Such as?" Emma asked.

"He knows that I'm the Heir of Slytherin, and he also knows that you're related to me, or at least are part of my family. What better

way is there to get to me than by killing the people I care about?"

Emma looked shocked for a moment and then nodded slowly. "I see. What sort of wards do you suggest?"

Orion looked round the lounge, frowning thoughtfully. Flicking his wand, he erected strong privacy charms and sat back down. "Parseltongue wards I think, they're the one sort of ward Voldemort would have no chance of breaking, even if he has got the rest of his magic back. Maybe a Fidelius if he and Death Eaters start becoming too annoying."

"Not the Fidelius, unless you plan to hide us from the world," Charles stated firmly. "Get the other wards up first, you'd be the only person I know of who could break them, so I'm not worried about him getting to us here."

Orion looked sharply at his grandfather and his eyes closed briefly. "Is that a lack of faith in me I hear?"

"No," Charles responded mildly, "merely that we're not planning to hide from possible retribution. If we do need to use that charm, you'll be the Secret Keeper, we wouldn't trust anyone else with the job. We just don't want to use it right now."

A shrug was all the response Charles got and the older Potter sighed. "Find Voldemort's last Horcruxes and either kill him or make him unable to hurt anyone ever again."

Orion nodded silently, not happy that his family was choosing to ignore the safest charm he could think of but he also understood why they were taking the route they were. Sighing, he ran a hand through his hair, hearing the brief chuckle from Charles as he saw it, before standing.

"Alright, I'll get my team working on finding him, but I think we'll see a

surge of Death Eater activity soon so finding him shouldn't be too difficult. Getting rid of him will be the tricky part." Walking to the Floo, he turned and said, "I'll do some research tonight, and get some of my friends from work to help me ward this place tomorrow. Would you be prepared to spend tonight at Marauder Manor? That already has Parseltongue wards on it, and I'd feel happier if you were there, just in case Voldemort comes back tonight."

Charles and Emma looked at each other and then gave Orion an affirmative answer. Leaving them packing, the Unspeakable returned to Hogwarts, preparing to spend a good portion of the evening after dinner buried in the library.

Accordingly, after dinner, Orion found a quiet spot in the back corner of the library and surrounded himself with books on wards. Contrary to popular opinion, wards weren't difficult to understand. The difficulty with wards was the amount of power you put into them. A small ward wouldn't exhaust an average witch or wizard, but the more powerful ones did take an above-average witch or wizard to be able to achieve the desired result. A ward such as the one that Orion was planning for Potter Manor would need several people working in concert with each other, although as the primary caster, all the power would flow from his helpers through him and into the ground around the manor, where it would join with the natural magic in the earth and form a strong shield not only around the house but over top of it as well.

Finding the one he wanted, Orion made sure he had all the necessary information which was available on it before he closed the books and stood up. Stretching his arms above his head and feeling several tense muscles in his back loosen with an almost relieved sigh, he was about to put all the books back when he heard furtive footsteps drawing close to his location.

Quickly, yet silently, he sat down, disillusioning both himself and his research materials. The spell was powerful enough that whoever was coming shouldn't see him, yet weak enough that it wouldn't

create a noticeable shimmer if he remained still.

As the Marauders came into view, Orion relaxed and was about to let the spell go when Remus said, "Green eyes?"

Orion stiffened and listened carefully. This sounded serious.

"Yes," Lily hissed back, "and keep your voice down. We don't know where your father is, and I don't think he'd be happy that we're trying to work out his secret."

"He's given us enough hints – it's like he wants us to find out," James pointed out reasonably. "Besides, are you sure they went green, Lily?"

Lily looked around and then sat at the table directly next to the one that Orion was at. Now Orion had a problem – did he eavesdrop on their conversation, and possibly learn what information they'd been able to work out about him, or did he leave and risk being discovered. As Severus and Remus sat down almost on top of him, the decision was made for him – he couldn't leave without alerting them to the fact that there was someone there.

"For the last time, James, yes I'm sure," Lily snapped, her eyes sparking with anger. "They went green, almost the same shade as..." she trailed off and swallowed hard before shaking her head in denial.

"Almost the same shade as what?" Sirius prodded.

"Almost the same shade as Mum's," Lily finished. "But that can't be right. No one would have such a similar eye color unless they're related and your dad and my mum aren't."

"Maybe they are," Severus said with a grin. As the rest of the Marauders turned to him with disbelieving looks he pushed a strand of hair out of his eyes and continued, "Don't look at me like that. Let's

list all the facts we have about Dad, both from what he's told us and what we can logically work out, and let's form some possible theories about this secret of his."

"Won't he be annoyed though?" Lily asked, seeming nervous about prying too far into the private life of one of her professors, who also happened to be the father of two of her best friends."

"James said it earlier," Remus said impatiently, "he's given us hints, and even though he's said he doesn't want us asking questions, he can't fault us for trying to work out the secret simply based on what he's given us already. Let's have a go."

"We can have fun making up all sorts of outlandish theories too," Sirius said with a chuckle.

"Such as?" Severus asked.

"Such as, oh," Sirius looked thoughtfully up at the ceiling, "that he's really Voldemort's illegitimate son from the future, come back to destroy dear old dad because he doesn't want the stigma of being related to him."

As Orion sat at his table, too shocked to even be irritated at such a wild and untrue theory, the Maruaders, both young and old, cracked up laughing. While he couldn't do much about the younger versions, Orion sent a mental "Shut up," to the older ones.

"What's your theory then?" Sirius said rather waspishly, glaring at James, Severus, and Remus.

Severus, James, and Remus looked at each other and then Remus drew out some parchment from his robe pocket.

"Facts first," he said. "What are they?"

"Fact one, he's from the future," James said.

"Fact two, he's an orphan, who was raised by his muggle relatives until he was fifteen, when his godfather took him in," Severus added.

Remus carefully wrote the facts down, and added one of his own, saying it as he wrote it. "Fact three, his father was friends with a werewolf, and became an animagus to accompany his friend on the full moon."

"Fact four, his father and his father's friends had some sort of feud with his future potions professor which ended up with dad being blamed for stuff that wasn't his fault," Severus said with a frown.

"Fact five, his true eye colour is emerald green," Lily put in quietly.

Remus looked at her skeptically but added it to the list, putting a question mark next to it when she wasn't looking. "Fact six," he said, "he has four patroni, not one, a stag, a dog, a wolf and a panther. Why would he have four?"

"A patronus represents what or who a person thinks of as their protector," James said, "so the question there would be, who are the four people represented by those animals."

"One would be his father, surely," Sirius said. "As an orphan, he'd want to feel as close to his parents as possible, so having his father as one of his patroni would make sense."

"But which one is it?" Severus asked, frustrated.

"Don't know, but here's another fact to write down – he was famous in the future, and he didn't like it," James said, cutting off the patronus debate. "He also has a serious grudge against Professor Dumbledore."

Remus wrote both facts down, and chewed the end of his quill thoughtfully. "His potions professor eventually became his mentor, and from what Dad's said, he looked after him a lot, even when they didn't like each other."

"He likes pranks too," Sirius put in, "but not bullies," he added with a frown.

"True," Remus muttered, writing it down.

"What about his relationships with us?" Severus said suddenly, turning to look at his brother. "Remember when we were grounded for, er, whatever it was, and we asked him what we were like in the future?"

Remus' eyes widened. "Yeah. He said that his relationship with me was mostly good with a few rocky patches but yours was more complicated, starting out rocky but getting better later on. That definitely should go on the list."

"And what about when we first met you, Lily?" James said. "Didn't Uncle Orion spend a lot of time talking with your parents?"

"Yes but what does that have to do with anything? He was probably telling them about the magical world and what to expect," Lily said.

"He could have been," James agreed, "but let's say that he and your mum are related, what if he was telling them his secret?"

Lily closed her mouth, which she'd opened to refute James' comment, and thought about it. "OK, but what do we think that secret is then, if we're going to assume they're related?"

"Don't know. What about the relationship between Dad and Uncle Charles though?" Severus said. "Uncle Charles treats Dad almost as though he's you, James, or an older version of you at least."

James looked very thoughtful. "They look a bit similar too," he said.

"What other facts do we have?" Remus asked.

"He married his best female friend, and his best male friend became their enemy," Sirius said with an uncomfortable glance towards Severus and James."

"He married for love, the same as his father did, and both he and his father married muggle-born witches," Lily said, watching as Remus wrote it down on the increasingly long list.

"He also became an Animagus in the summer before his sixth year," Sirius said with a wistful sigh at the achievement.

"Not to mention that he's bloody good on a broom," James said with an even more wistful sigh.

"From what he said about his muggle relatives, I think they abused him," Severus said with a shudder. He watched as Remus wrote it down, and then helped to spread out the list on the table. "Wow, that's a long list. How about we work on those theories now?"

The others agreed, and Orion found himself being treated to a list of increasingly bizarre theories from the younger versions of his family while having to endure the not so silent laughter from the older versions in his mind. One theory made all of them sit up and take notice, and it was proposed by Lily.

"We know he's from the future, and he resembles your dad, James, and he's got similar eyes to my Mum, so, is there any way he could be related to us?"

"What sort of relationship?" James asked.

"Well, could he be a future Potter?"

James, Remus, and Severus looked at each other, and then at Lily. "It could be possible," James replied reluctantly. "If he is though, why wouldn't he tell us?"

"What was his original reason for not telling us the entire story?" Severus enquired.

"It involved us," Remus said immediately.

"There was something else," his brother said insistently.

"You mean the possibility of Voldemort torturing the information out of us if he got hold of us?" Sirius asked.

"Yeah, that," Severus responded. "I think we've got enough to work out a tentative theory anyway, but we need more proof. There are still a lot of holes in all of our theories, especially the future Potter one."

"True," James muttered. "I'm not sure how I'd feel about Uncle Orion being related to me anyway."

Orion stiffened in his seat, trying unsuccessfully to bury the small flare of hurt which James' unthinking comment had caused.

"What do you mean by that?" Severus and Remus snapped hotly. "No matter who he was in the future, in this time he's our dad and your uncle."

James raised his hands in surrender. "I didn't mean anything bad by it. Just that, if he's a future Potter, can you imagine how awkward it would be if we truly were related."

"How so?" Lily asked.

James rolled his eyes. "He's from the future, meaning that technically, in the future, we'd be older than him. What if I've been calling him uncle all these years, and he turns out to be my grandson?"

The Marauders looked at each other in shock, and then Sirius snorted and said, "Or even worse, what if he's actually your son?"

They froze for a moment, and then cracked up laughing. "Nah, that's too weird to be true. He'd have told us way before now," Severus said, wiping tears of laughter from his eyes.

"Not if he needed time to come to grips with the idea himself or if he was holding onto it as a prank for when we're seventeen," Remus said, chuckling. "Shall we run with that theory and see if our other facts fit it?"

"Not now, we have homework to finish and I haven't finished that DADA essay for Uncle Orion's class anyway," James muttered as he pulled the essay out of his bag. His friends followed his lead and Orion was able to slip away from his table as Severus and Remus moved round their own table. Escaping from the library, he made his way to his rooms and sank into his favorite chair.

"They're getting too close," he muttered, "and your younger self is too sharp for his own good, Dad," he said.

"Hey, at least they think it's only a joke," James protested. "Besides, you have given out a lot of hints, hints which they wouldn't have been able to put together when they were younger but they're fourteen now, and more than capable of putting together a workable theory from a few broad hints. Until they've got a theory which they think fits all the available information they won't do anything else. They won't come to you with it either until they believe they've worked it out. Just relax."

Orion sighed. "Fine, I'll leave it alone. I just hope they wait until next

year to spring it on me though. I don't think I could take many more unexpected shocks right now."

Author Note

In case any of you haven't read my profile recently, I'm putting up the original Chronicles of the Chosen One series again. I found the files in my email archive and have spent the last few days putting them back in post-worthy format again. Because this is the original series, you may notice that it's not as well-written as *Walking a New Path* or *Erasing History*, and I will delete any flames I get which point this out. I know it's not as good, I know there are probably a million things wrong with it, but please, if you must point them out, do so nicely, so that I can fix those mistakes in the second version. I am putting it up again so those who have been waiting for the revised, better-written version two of it will have something to read while they wait.

On that note, the second version will be fairly different. I won't give out too many hints, other than that I'm redoing the relationship between Kiara and Sal, having them becoming Master and Padawan when Kiara is seventeen rather than fourteen like it is in the original, and the reason Sal adopts her as his padawan will also be different. I will also be changing quite a few other things, but the essential plot of the story – Harry being raised as a Jedi on Earth and having Kiara as his master will stay the same.

Hopefully this chapter of *Erasing History* and the soon-to-be-reposted Chronicles series will tide you over while I attempt to fit my writing around my new job, which is going very well by the way. I will also be reposting more chapters of *Dark Apprentice* soon as well.

May the Force be with you

Padawan Lynne

Chapter Thirty-Eight: The Third Task and the Parent Protection Plan

The day of the Third Task dawned bright and sunny. Orion sighed as he got out of bed, it was too nice a day to potentially risk his life, not to mention worry his friends and family. He hadn't heard any more whispers from the Marauders regarding his secret, but he'd been the recipient of several furtive and not-so-furtive glances from all of them in the few weeks in between the conversation he'd overheard and today. James, Severus and Remus seemed to be watching him as closely as they could, while Sirius and Lily were more polite about their interest in him, and looked away whenever he caught them staring.

"I really hope they don't decide to try and compare photos of me and Charles," he muttered to himself as he got dressed. Even if only to himself, he admitted that there was a resemblance between him and his grandfather, and it wasn't only the hair. Their facial structure was very similar too, and Orion consciously had to restrain himself from running a hand through his hair. If nothing else, having the exact same gestures would certainly be a large clue to his true identity, as while it would be natural for James to have picked up that habit from his father, it would be suspicious for Orion to have the same one, especially as he supposedly wasn't related in any way to either Charles or James.

A knock came at the door and Orion opened it to admit James, Severus and Remus, all of whom looked worried.

"What's wrong, boys?" Orion asked, flexing his wrist and sending his wand back into its sheath, which he always wore on his right arm.

"Can't we wish our father good luck without him asking us if something's wrong?" Remus asked, looking innocently up at Orion.

Orion snorted. "Right," he said, not bothering to hide his amusement, "now why don't I believe that?"

"It's true," James insisted, but his darting glances at the rest of the room betrayed him and Orion sat down in a chair with a sigh.

"What's really going on? I'm not in the mood to decipher more riddles, the Third Task one was hard enough," he said, allowing just a touch of irritation to edge his tone. He loved them, he really did, and usually he'd indulge their transparent attempts to hide their true purpose but he wasn't in the right frame of mind for it right then.

"We've just come from the Quidditch Pitch, there's a huge hole in the middle of it and some sort of gigantic snake inside, judging from the hissing," Remus said in a rush. "We don't want you to get hurt in this task."

Orion now smiled. "Boys, who am I?" he asked.

The question drew puzzled looks from the three Marauders. "Er, you're Orion Potter, our dad and James' uncle," Severus said slowly.

"Yes, and who else am I?" Orion prodded.

James suddenly groaned. "Lord Slytherin," he said. "Of course you wouldn't be worried about a snake, you can talk to them."

"Right," his uncle said. "Is there anything else?"

He was mildly alarmed when he was suddenly caught in a three-way hug, the tightness of which told him that they were worried about more than the task. "We just don't want to lose you," Severus mumbled into Orion's robe. Pulling back so he could breathe, he added, "The rumor is that this task is really, really dangerous, and, well,"

He trailed off and shrugged helplessly. Orion narrowed his eyes.

"Well what?" he asked.

"You almost died in the last task," Severus finished. "Is it wrong to wish you weren't competing? We don't want you to die."

Orion sat down. "Look at me," he said firmly. He waited until three slightly damp sets of eyes met his, and said, "Yes, this Tournament has been very dangerous, and I'm not taking this last task lightly. I will do everything in my power not to die, but you must realize that I can't promise it with any certainty whatsoever."

The Marauders held his gaze for a long time, not saying anything, and Orion now wished he hadn't been quite so thorough with Severus and Remus' Occlumency training. He couldn't get a sense of what his children were feeling, and James wasn't looking at him, aware that his shields weren't as good as his cousins' were, so he couldn't get a read on his nephew either.

Finally, after almost five minutes of silent staring, James broke it. "Do you promise?" he asked.

Sighing, Orion debated not answering but when Severus and Remus joined James in giving him their most earnest, pleading looks, he found he couldn't do it.

"I promise that I will do all I can to stay alive throughout this task," he said solemnly.

"OK," the boys said in unison, but they didn't sound happy.

"If you do get killed, we'll bring you back and kill you again," Remus threatened, drawing a chuckle from Orion in response.

"Oh really?" he said, ruffling Remus' hair affectionately.

"Yeah, either that or we'll implement the PPP," James said, some of

his normal humor coming back.

"And what's the PPP?" Orion asked.

"The Parent Protection Plan," Severus answered, giving his father what he thought was a stern look. Orion had to swallow the urge to smile, it wasn't too far off the same sort of look he was used to from the older version but at fourteen, his son wasn't quite old enough to pull it off correctly, and while it would have intimidated Severus' classmates, it didn't have the same effect on him.

"The Parent Protection Plan," he repeated thoughtfully. "What exactly would that entail?"

"That research we did when Lily was attacked proved helpful," Remus began. "We found the spells you suggested, and," he paused to glare at Orion, "if you don't take care of yourself in this task, we'll cast them on you and if you get in trouble, we'll come and rescue you."

Orion bit his lip, hard. He knew they were deadly serious about this and he wouldn't hurt their feelings by laughing at them, although he did find the idea of three fourteen-year-old wizards protecting an Unspeakable to be extremely amusing. Quelling the urge to laugh, he arched an eyebrow at his three would-be protectors and said, "Have you forgotten my reaction to Charles casting a spell on me without my consent? I appreciate the thought, but I'm supposed to be protecting you, not the other way round. Besides," he paused for a few seconds, "I would have thought that you'd use those spells to protect yourselves and Lily."

"We discussed it, but she said no in the end," James admitted. "She said that using the spells like that would make her feel like she had four bodyguards instead of friends and she didn't want that."

Orion nodded. "I see. Well, as much as I appreciate the thought, I

don't need you using those spells on me, alright? Nothing's going to happen except for me winning the Tournament and Abraxas Malfoy being in second place."

The boys looked reluctant to leave but Orion firmly shooed them out the door, and as soon as they'd left he sank down into his chair and laughed until tears poured down his face.

"It's not funny, Harry, they were being serious," the older version of Remus said, disapproval evident in his tone.

"I know," Orion responded, "and I wasn't laughing at them, I was laughing at the situation. I think it's incredibly good of them to want to protect me, incredibly brave too, considering the nature of my job, but what I was really amused about was that I could almost see you, Sev, and Dad standing there while they were trying to threaten me into taking better care of myself."

"We wish we had been," James interjected, sounding more serious than Orion had ever heard him. "They might be young but they have a point, son, this task is going to be dangerous and people have died before. Hell, you and the other contestants all almost died in the last task, if you hadn't transformed into Salazar then you might have done."

"You have been incredibly lucky so far but luck doesn't last forever, and sooner or later, it will run out. Don't throw your life away because you got complacent," Lily added.

Orion gave vent to an inarticulate growl. "I know but I don't want them going overboard and doing something stupid just because they're worried about me. I'm still not convinced that they're not going to try something anyway, something worse than just casting a couple of spells."

"Why are you so convinced that they'll try something?" Sirius asked.

"Because I understand how they feel. In the original timeline, if I'd thought about it, I could probably have talked Hermione and Ron into helping me come up with a plan to protect you from harm," Orion shot back. "They want to protect me, they want to keep me from being hurt, and I think they'll do almost anything to achieve that objective if they perceive that I'm not looking after myself."

"Well you know what to do then, don't you," Severus said sarcastically.

"No, what," Orion responded equally sarcastically.

"Look after yourself," his spirit family chorused, and Orion groaned.

"Fine," he muttered, standing up and checking that he had everything he needed. The champions had been told the day before that they would have to bring everything they thought they might need with them when they gathered at the starting point for the final task. Accordingly, Orion had dressed in his Unspeakable robes, which were cut to allow maximum freedom of movement, and reinforced by complex layers of spells all woven together and then woven into the cloth the robes were made of. Additionally, underneath that, he wore a dragonhide vest and which was also spelled against everything except the Unforgivables. Dragonhide boots and arm guards completed the outfit and the arm guards also had sheaths on them, one which held his wand, and the other a sharp dagger, one of a pair which he'd found in Salazar Slytherin's study in the Chamber of Secrets.

Checking that his wand and dagger were in their sheaths on his arms, Orion twisted his body from side to side, checking that the other Slytherin dagger, on a sheath attached to his left calf would stay put, and that Gryffindor's sword, shrunk to dagger size, and in a sheath attached to his belt wouldn't impede his movement.

With all weapons secure, Orion closed his eyes and took a breath. In and out, in and out, in and out, the rhythm continued until he had succeeded in calming his emotions and focusing his thoughts. He couldn't afford any distractions today. The first part of the task, getting past the snake, might well prove to be the easiest part of it. He didn't want to think what the organizers had dreamed up for the rest of it.

"One thing is certain," he murmured to himself as he completed his preparations. "This task may very well prove to be lethal."

With that cheerful thought, he made his way down to the starting point. On the way, he met Abraxas Malfoy, who looked as calm as ever, but Orion thought that beneath the façade, Malfoy would be about as calm as he was. Arriving at the Quidditch pitch, Orion frowned as he saw the hole that Remus had described. The hissing from inside it certainly sounded like a large snake, but Orion couldn't be sure whether it was the basilisk or not. Swallowing a sudden surge of apprehension, he turned to the organizers, his face a blank mask, wondering exactly what they'd have to do.

The apprehension increased when the chief organizer put a sonorous charm on himself and addressed the crowd, which quieted instantly, wanting to hear what awaited the six champions. "Ladies and gentlemen, we have come to the final task of this tournament. This is the most dangerous task of the three, and while six may start this task, it's anyone's guess as to whether six will finish it. The task is quite simple; the champions will have to make their way through several challenges, which incorporate both tests of knowledge and tests of physical skill. At the end is the Triwizard Cup, and the champion who makes their way through all the challenges and touches the Cup first is the winner. To start the task, the champions will enter this tunnel behind me and face their first challenge. If they make it through that, they will go on to the others. They will start the task in the order of the points they have, so the one with the most points will start first and then after one minute the second placed

champion will enter and so on. It's time to start, so champions, good luck."

Orion entered first as, due to his efforts with the Patronus in the second task he'd rocketed into first place. Abraxas had slipped into third, with one of the French champions occupying second place and the other French champion and two Bulgarian champions occupying fourth, fifth, and sixth places. He had one minute to get what head start he could, which as it turned out, wasn't much. Jumping into the hole, he used a levitation charm to slow his descent.

Reaching the bottom, he was almost crushed as the French champion landed almost on top of him, his descent having lasted just over a minute. Swearing in French, Orion pulled himself up and glared at his closest rival. In French, he snarled, "What the hell was that? Did you not learn the levitation charm at school? You could have crushed me. Idiot!"

The French champion glared back and replied just as heatedly, "You should have moved! You're the crazy one!"

They were still glaring at each other and hissing insults when Abraxas landed smoothly beside them. "Well, this is interesting," he drawled. "Lord Slytherin, should we continue onwards?"

Orion abruptly switched focus and pulled himself under control. "Don't call me that!" he snapped, but although the tone was sharp, Malfoy's distraction had served its purpose and Orion turned to the tunnel which they were now in. As they moved down the tunnel, Orion's keen hearing picked up the sound of soft thumps which signaled the arrival of the other champions. Picking up the pace, he moved faster, but kept his senses trained on what lay ahead.

The hissing increased in volume and the champions, now six in number, stopped. The five non-Parselmouths looked to Orion with some trepidation. "What's ahead of us?" Abraxas whispered, keeping

his voice low so he didn't attract the unknown creature's attention. Orion frowned, and shook his head.

Hello he hissed.

The hissing stopped and then began again. Who speaks?

Orion swallowed hard. The hissing voice of the snake sounded old, and, he thought, male. This would prove difficult. The tunnel was too small for a decent fight, but he knew there had to be a way round it.

Orion Potter. I and my friends wish to pass by. Will you allow us to do so peacefully?

A burst of hissing greeted his question, which Orion interpreted as laughter. No. You will have to fight me to get past. I will not allow any to get past without a fight.

Orion broke off the conversation and swore in several different languages. "It's a very large snake, probably quite old, and it's said that it won't allow any of us to get past it without a fight. I'm guessing, based on the clue, that it's a basilisk, which means that we'll have to be very careful."

"What about your basilisk form, won't you be able to kill it?" Aleksandar asked.

Orion scowled. "No. The tunnel is too small for my form to fit, much less fight. Plus that basilisk sounds like a really old one, and if I'm right, it will be more powerful than mine."

"You're Lord Slytherin, aren't all snakes supposed to bow before you?" This was from the French champion that Orion had been exchanging insults with at the start of the task.

Orion chuckled. "Snakes are very independent; they will do as I ask if

they feel like it, not because I command them to do it. That basilisk has been assigned to guard the path; it won't slither aside if I ask nicely."

The champions looked at each other and shivered. None of them said it, but as they continued towards the basilisk, they were all thinking the same thing: How many of us will make it to the second challenge?

After a couple of twists and turns the first challenge came into view. The snake was indeed a basilisk, and Orion's suspicion that it was an old, powerful one, was proven correct. The six champions stopped and stared at it for a minute, all holding their breath. "Bloody hell," Abraxas muttered. "How the hell are we going to beat that?"

"Blind it first," Orion whispered back.

The champions all aimed their wands at the snake, and their most powerful spells. The snake dodged the first barrage, and hissed menacingly, its fangs exposed and dripping venom. Orion led the charge, as the champions spread out, to make themselves less of a target. As the snake struck, aiming for Aleksandar, Orion drew Gryffindor's sword, enlarged it, and struck at the basilisk's exposed neck. The sword bounced off the diamond-hard scales, as Orion had expected, but as the snake turned on him, he waited until the last moment and jumped to the side, landing on a small rock formation. Holding the sword at an angle and with the snake's head lower than he was, Orion thrust it down. It was more luck than skill which saw the point of the sword land in the snake's left eye.

Screeching in agony, the basilisk reared up and, blinded in one eye and unable to properly see where it was going, inadvertently left the path forward open. The champions took the chance and ran for it. Abraxas made it through first, followed by one of the Bulgarian champions, then one of the French. Orion was last through the gap before it closed and he turned to see the two remaining champions

had been cut off.

The snake, enraged by being partially blinded, resorted to its sense of smell to locate its opponents. As the two remaining champions dodged and ducked and tried to cast spells at their scaly opponent, the snake quivered, and then turned the full power of its one good eye on the two opponents in front of it.

Soft cries came from the Bulgarian and French champions standing behind Abraxas as they saw their friends die. Orion closed his eyes, offering a quick prayer that the surviving champions made it through the rest of the task, and then murmured a prayer for God to look after the two dead wizards.

"Come on," he ordered softly. "We can't do anything for them, and standing around here brings the risk that that ugly great snake will turn round and have us for dessert."

With murmurs of discontent and grief, the others slowly followed him. They were all shaken and severely worried about the rest of the task ahead but they had no choice but to continue on.

In the stands, the crowd was also upset at the death of the two champions so early in the task. The French and Bulgarian contingents were more subdued than their British counterparts although the British wizards and witches were keeping their celebrations to a minimum out of respect for the recent tragedy. James, Severus, and Remus were clinging to Charles and Emma, all worried that Orion might be next to go, while Sirius was clinging to his father, as worried about Orion as his friends were.

The second challenge almost surprised the remaining four champions. Coming out into a subterranean cavern they saw that the second challenge seemed to be in two parts, and the first part was a written test on the development of poisons and their antidotes throughout history. Orion chuckled as he mentally thanked Severus

and Remus for forcing him to study magical history properly, including the history of poisons and antidotes. His surrogate uncle and mentor had hauled him into Godric's Hollow every night for mental tutoring sessions, and Orion had studied hard. He had tried, once, to get out of the lessons, but a stern lecture from both Remus and Severus, followed by one from James and Lily, had convinced him to give in. It was still a source of amusement for the spirits that Orion had stubbornly protested that he could study for himself throughout Remus and Severus' lecture, but had crumbled quickly during the following one from his parents. Orion put it down to having used up all his arguments with his former professors, while Sirius maintained that it was the shock of being scolded by his parents which had led to Orion conceding defeat. They were still keeping a friendly running argument going on the subject, and keeping score of all the points won and lost, much to the amusement of the other four spirits.

"What is this?" Aleksandar muttered, chewing the end of his quill, one of which had been provided for each champion.

"Keep going, I have a feeling that it will have something to do with the next part," Orion murmured back, already halfway through the test. He came to one question and frowned. It was a tricky one, and he tilted his head to the side. "Severus?" he asked mentally.

"No, Harry, I'm not going to help you," Severus replied dryly. "You have all the knowledge you need to get through this, the answer is in the question itself. Look harder."

Sighing, Orion took a closer look at the question and after a few minutes, he swore at himself. "Of course," he muttered, writing down the answer. Minutes later, the parchments rolled themselves up and a new parchment unrolled itself in front of each of the champions. It read,

You may now approach the second part of the task. There are three

poisons you have to identify and create the antidotes for. Get it right, and you may pass through the fire and on to the rest of the task. Get it wrong, and you will stay until you manage to get it right. When you have correctly identified the poisons and created the antidotes, a vial will appear on your station which contains a potion allowing you to pass through the flames. The flames are impervious to flame freezing spells so the potion is the only way through. Good luck.

"Merlin's bloody balls," Orion sighed, ignoring the choking sounds in his mind as Lily took exception to his choice of words. Minding his language was the lowest on his current list of priorities.

Outside, in the stands, the crowd chuckled at Orion's language, but by the looks on their parents' faces, the Marauders knew that they wouldn't be allowed to use the same sort of language unless they wanted their mouths washed out. They'd recovered from the basilisk incident, and now they were eagerly watching to see what sort of trap awaited the champions in the second challenge.

Orion approached his station and frowned at the vials in front of him. Another roll of parchment lay beside them and he picked it up, reading it quickly. His frown grew deeper as he read down the page, this was very tricky indeed. The poisons were all obscure ones, not ancient, but definitely not on the list of modern poisons and antidotes either. Sighing, and venting his frustration with another string of creative swear words, he got to work.

"Stop," Severus suddenly snapped, as Orion was about to add a reagent to the liquid swirling in a cup in front of him.

"What?" Orion snapped back, making very sure that he kept the conversation purely mental.

"Let me help," Severus said, "and for Merlin's sake, put that reagent down."

"Why are you helping me now?" Orion asked suspiciously, putting the reagent down and acting as though he'd had second thoughts about it.

"Because I don't want you blowing yourself and everyone else sky-high," the former Potions Master growled. "I won't do all the work, but I'll give you as much help as I can."

Orion sighed. "Fine. What am I doing wrong here?"

Severus peered at the poison, using Orion's eyes to do it. "Nothing, but you were going to add the wrong reagent. You're almost there with the identification, just keep going."

In the end, it took Orion fifteen minutes to identify all three poisons, and another fifteen to create the antidotes. Looking up from his work station as the vial appeared in front of him, he was startled to realize that Abraxas had already finished and gone, and the French champion had also evidently got it before him as well. He was heartened, as he stepped through the fire, to see that he was at least in third place, Aleksandar was looking more and more frustrated and angry as he tried to get the correct answer.

Faint noises up ahead alerted him to the fact that Abraxas and the French champion was entangled in whatever the third challenge was. Shifting to Shadow, he quickly yet quietly made his way towards the noise, noting that the tunnel was sloping upwards, and it was lighter than before. Shifting back to human form, he disillusioned himself and waited for a minute. Stretching out with his magic, he tried to determine what was ahead, and then decided that as he was already behind, he shouldn't spend too much time waiting.

He ran to the end of the tunnel, and saw that it opened out into the arena, and the third and, it seemed, final part of the task, was a duel. Who it was between was momentarily unclear, until he spotted what had to be an army of dueling dummies. Dueling dummies, as their

name suggested, were training aids for professional duelers, they could be set to the level the dueler wished, and gave extremely realistic, human reactions, both when they were hit and in terms of reflexes, speed, and spell arsenals. The dummies that Abraxas and the French champion were fighting seemed to be set at professional level, which would be a problem for most witches and wizards, who didn't bother to learn dueling beyond what was required in sixth and seventh year DADA. For the champions, however, they posed an interesting challenge, a chance to test their skill without any lethal consequences.

'I stand corrected' Orion thought as several dummies converged on him at once, and two fired Killing Curses. "Reducto!" he snarled, blowing the two AK wielding dummies to pieces. He kicked the third in the face, sending it reeling backwards, and settled himself in a loose stance, ready to move whatever way he needed to. Six more came at him, moving in a semicircle, trying to surround him.

He backed up, focusing on keeping the dummies in front of him and letting none get behind him. He kept a peripheral awareness of where his rivals were, and what they were doing, but the rest of his world narrowed to the dummies that were keeping him on his toes. Shielding, dodging, ducking and casting, he was unaware of the picture he presented to the students in the stands, who were stunned into silence at their DADA professor's skill as a duelist.

Severus, Remus, and James were yelling themselves hoarse, cheering their father/uncle on, while Orion Black was thinking that he definitely didn't want to engage the Unspeakable in a duel anytime soon, even a friendly one. The level of skill that was on display in the arena was one he didn't think he could match, although if asked, he'd certainly give it a go.

James suddenly grasped Severus' arm in a tight grip. "LOOK," he yelled, pointing to the three dummies that his uncle had dealt with earlier. Severus and Remus looked and gasped in shock.

"DAD!" they yelled.

Orion, busy dispatching a couple of dummies with a creative but lethal combination of spells, risked a glance up at the stands where his family was sitting. "WHAT!" he yelled back.

"BEHIND YOU!" the boys yelled in reply, and Orion spun to see the dummies that he'd "killed" had come back to life, and there were more of them.

"Oh shit," he breathed. Leaping over to where Abraxas was pinned down behind a conjured stone wall, he snapped, "Those bloody dummies have self-healing capabilities and replication charms on them. For every one we kill, they'll turn into two."

"How are we supposed to beat them and where's the Cup?" Abraxas snarled back, looking disheveled and not at all like how he usually liked to present himself.

"No idea. These must be a distraction, or an obstacle to overcome. What happened to the French guy?" Orion asked, breathing slightly harder than normal.

"Died when one of those dummies fired a cutting curse at him. It caught him in the neck and decapitated him," Abraxas answered tonelessly.

Orion winced. "Are you thinking that someone's out to kill us?"

"Us as in just us, or us as in all the Triwizard champions?" Abraxas enquired.

"The first option is frankly disturbing, but the second is unthinkable as well," Orion replied after a few minutes which he spent shielding himself and Abraxas from several high-powered offensive spells.

The wall blew apart, and the two champions rolled away from the debris in separate directions. Coughing, and covered in dust, Orion swore as he felt a sharp pain in his leg and then a sticky wetness. Not needing to look down to know that he was injured, the Unspeakable drew his daggers and threw them with unerring accuracy.

Two dummies fell with his daggers buried in their foreheads. They didn't get up, and Orion turned his attention to the dummies surrounding him. Drawing Gryffindor's sword again, he decapitated four of the dummies with one sweep, and crushed the heads as he stood on them. Calling his daggers back with a wandless Accio charm, he Disillusioned himself and stayed close to the stands. Catching his breath, he surveyed the arena, which was looking more like a battlefield.

'Hmmp, substitute Death Eaters for dummies and it would be a battlefield,' he thought, wondering where the hell the Triwizard Cup was. Looking around, he spotted a gleam of silver behind the dummies which were closest to the judges and he had a flash of insight. He took a closer look at the dummies' movements and realised that the champions had been attacked with more vigor when they got near that side of the arena.

"Yes," he murmured. Groaning noises alerted him to a new problem and he snarled in frustration as he saw the dummies that he'd killed with the daggers and sword get up and replicate themselves. Sweeping the battlefield with his eyes, he saw that only himself and Abraxas were alive, Aleksandar having made it out of the tunnel and died from wounds sustained from several dummies who caught him unawares.

"GET DOWN!" he roared. Abraxas turned round and threw himself to the ground as Orion unleashed his most lethal spell yet.

"INCENDIO!" Flames poured out of his wand, and rushed across the ground, bending round the prone form of Abraxas Malfoy as Orion directed it at the dummies. The dummies went up in smoke, and the two British champions were the only ones left standing at the end.

"Potter," Abraxas said tiredly as Orion made his way over to him, "you are quite possibly the most dangerous wizard I've ever come across."

"Thanks," Orion murmured equally tiredly. "How about we get that cup now and finish this blasted tournament. All I want at this moment is a nice hot bath and to spend time with my children."

"Considering we're the only two still alive, it's a British victory anyway, so how about we tie for it. We'll touch it at the same time," Abraxas offered.

Orion stared at him. "What happened to, 'I'll win but I want you to be in second place?'"

"That was before our competitors all died, it was only sheer luck that we weren't in their place," Abraxas responded, too tired to snap at Orion the way he wanted to.

"True. OK, but if it turns out to be a Portkey or anything like that, I'm going to kill the organizers," Orion said.

Wearily, the two champions made their way over to where the Cup sat in the middle of a small patch of earth, surrounded by a shield. Looking at each other, Orion and Abraxas swiftly dismantled the shield and lifted it up between them. Only then did their senses come back to them in a rush, along with the cheering of the crowd. As they made their way towards the judges, still holding the cup, they were assaulted by their respective children, who, after assuring themselves that their fathers were alright, just tired and sporting minor wounds, eagerly escorted them to the judges' table.

The verdict was no surprise. Abraxas and Orion tied for the victory, the first tie in the history of the Tournament, as both wizards refused to duel each other to decide a winner. They firmly told the judges that with the deaths of the other champions, it was pointless to have one winner as both surviving champions were from the same country. Faced with this logic, the judges backed down and declared a draw.

That night, as Orion slept peacefully after the conclusion of the celebration feast and the presentation of the prize money, the Dark Lord was fuming. He'd managed to find a new headquarters and was currently trying to get in touch with his Death Eaters.

"I'm going to make you suffer before you die, Potter!" Voldemort promised, trying to send it down the link he shared with his nemesis. Scowling as it bounced off impenetrable shields, he too settled down to sleep, planning the best way of killing off the one person, in his view, who posed the greatest threat to his plan of world domination.

Chapter Thirty-Nine: Wild Theories and Insane Plans

With the end of the Triwizard Tournament, the staff and students of Hogwarts settled back into their usual routines. Orion could almost lose himself in the routine of classes and grading, occasionally punctuated by pranks from the Marauders. He enjoyed the pranks a lot more than the rest of the staff, and even assisted with several, on the strict understanding that his assistance not be mentioned. He'd had great fun helping with a recent prank against Dumbledore, and got a good deal of satisfaction from the fact that the elderly wizard was still trying to figure out how the prank had been managed.

"Professor Potter," a voice called out, and Orion raised his head. Putting the essay he was grading aside, he massaged his fingers and called out, "Come in."

Sirius stuck his head round the door and saw the piles of essays waiting to be done. "Oh, sorry Professor, I didn't realize you'd be busy. I can come back later," he said.

Orion shook his head and smiled warmly. "No, come in, I was ready for a break anyway. Honestly, I now understand why my professors wrote such harsh comments on some of my essays that I did as a student. Some of the essays I did weren't much better than the ones I'm now forced to grade, and I find myself wondering if they even listened to what I said in class."

"Probably not," Sirius snorted. "Apart from us I mean," he said hastily and Orion smirked.

"I've already graded your essays, and they were a breath of fresh air in the midst of this lot," he said with a wink, waving his hand at the essays, and Sirius relaxed. He wasn't sure, but if the professor was happy about the essays then their marks couldn't be too bad. Orion leaned back and said, "So, what brings you to my office on a weekend? Run out of prank ideas and need inspiration?"

"Orion Potter I heard that!" a voice snapped from outside the office and both Sirius and Orion jumped as Professor McGonagall entered the room, a frown on her face. "So it was you behind the latest series of pranks, was it?" she said, and Sirius was amused to see Orion shrink back against his chair looking slightly panicked.

"Did I say pranks? I mean story ideas," Orion said as the Head of Gryffindor advanced on him.

McGonagall leaned in close to him and said slowly, menacingly, "My office, Mr Potter. Now!"

Sirius was left sitting in his chair, completely stunned as his Head of House led his favorite professor out of his office like he was no older than the Marauders themselves. Coming to his senses, he ran out of the office and took a shortcut to the library, where he found his friends waiting expectantly.

"Well, where is he?" James asked.

Sirius shook his head impatiently. "Come on, I'll explain it on the way. Your uncle's in trouble with McGonagall." He hastily explained the brief conversation which Professor McGonagall had interrupted, and Orion's reaction to her interruption. James, Remus and Severus choked at the description of Professor McGonagall leading Orion off to her office and immediately headed towards that location, hoping to eavesdrop on the conversation. It was sure to be entertaining.

They met Orion on his way out of McGonagall's office and stopped, suddenly unsure of what to say. The older wizard looked very indignant, and seemed to be holding onto his temper through sheer force of will.

He spotted the Marauders and his expression changed in an instant. He smiled at them and said, "I gather you were going to eavesdrop?"

"Well, only if you and Professor McGonagall had still been inside," James finally admitted. He looked taken aback when Orion chuckled and shook his head.

"Don't worry, I'm not annoyed. I'd have done the same thing," he said with a wink.

"Dad, can I ask you something?" Severus asked.

"You just did but I'll let you ask something else," Orion replied, the old, well-worn joke helping to relieve the tension which was hanging in the air.

"How did you manage to change your emotions when you came out of the office?"

Orion looked at him for a long moment, and then said blandly, "It's called controlling your emotions." He ignored the groans coming from Godric's Hollow, and smiled at his son. "I only learnt it after years and years of practice though."

"Why was Professor McGonagall angry about the pranks on Professor Dumbledore though? He didn't seem to mind them," Remus said, looking very confused.

The aforementioned witch put her head round the door and smiled thinly. "I was angry because your father insists on playing pranks instead of helping to discourage them," she said, and Orion faced her, his face becoming a blank mask.

"So you don't think that a bit of harmless fun is a good idea?" he said.

"When it involves humiliating a respected professor and headmaster, no," she retorted sharply.

"I only gave him a dose of his own medicine," Orion snapped. "It's not my fault that he couldn't handle it."

"Unless you wish to continue our previous conversation, Professor Potter," McGonagall growled, "I would suggest that you stop right there." Lily squeaked, and the two professors abruptly realised that they still had an audience.

"I will see you later, Professor Potter, and we will discuss your recent spate of pranks against the headmaster," McGonagall said, her tone less sharp than it had been previously, but still authoritative.

"Of course, Professor McGonagall," Orion responded stiffly. He waited until McGonagall had shut the door of her office, and turned to the Marauders. "If you want to speak with me, it will have to wait. I need to go recover from that mauling."

The Marauders chuckled at the description. "Are you alright, Uncle Orion?" James asked, concerned.

Orion smiled and pulled him into a hug. "Of course I am. There's not much she can do to me other than yell. I'm just sorry you saw it, it really should have been a private matter but I doubt it would have remained private anyway."

"It was funny though," James said and Orion raised an eyebrow.

"Funny?" he asked.

James nodded eagerly. "Yes. Do you know what would have made it even better?"

"What?"

"If you and Professor McGonagall had changed into a lion and lioness and roared at each other," James said, a mischievous grin

spreading across his face.

Orion rolled his eyes. "What am I going to do with you?" he asked as Severus, Remus, Sirius and Lily all looked about ready to collapse on the floor due to laughing at the image James' words had created.

"Put up with me because I'm charming and helpful," James suggested, still grinning.

Orion snorted and ruffled James' hair. "Right. Go away before I decide to do some mauling of my own." He swiftly changed into Leo and swiped gently at James, who yelped and hid behind Severus, pretending to be scared.

Severus walked up to the large cat and flapped his hands at him. "Go away, shoo," he said, trying to adopt a stern tone and failing as Leo rubbed his head against him.

Orion changed back and grabbed hold of him. "Shoo, yourself," he said with a grin. He let Severus go and was about to speak when a sudden, sharp pain in his hidden scar made him wince and his hand involuntarily shot to his forehead, rubbing it to ease the pain.

"Dad?" Severus and Remus yelped in unison, along with James' "Uncle Orion!"

"I'm fine," he said, putting out a hand to stop them crowding him. "It's just Voldemort trying to get into my head. He didn't succeed."

"Are you sure? I mean, that looked like it hurt," Severus said. He was really worried, and Orion sighed.

"Sev, yes, it did hurt, but I'm used to it. He's been trying that trick ever since I learnt enough Occlumency to completely shut him out."

"So you're really OK?" James asked.

Orion smiled. "Yes, James, I'm really OK." He looked in the direction of his office and faked a groan. "As enjoyable as this chat has been, I do have essays to grade. Do you really need to talk to me now, or can it wait?"

The Marauders exchanged looks and then Remus looked up at him. "It can wait, Dad. We've got some more brainstorming to do."

Orion watched, bemused, as they ran off, their general direction seeming to suggest that they were headed for the library. Shrugging, he headed for his office, wishing that some bright wizard would invent self-grading essays, or quills that could be programmed to grade the essays on their own.

"Teachers have been wishing that since Hogwarts opened, Harry," Severus said rather dryly in his mind.

"Thanks for that," Orion replied equally dryly. "Am I the only teacher that Minerva's threatened with detention?"

"No," Remus said, sounding as though he was struggling not to laugh. "You should count yourself lucky that that's all she threatened you with. In your third year, Severus and I managed to royally piss her off and she made us both feel like students again in very short order."

"What happened?" Orion asked.

"She finally got tired of our, in her words, "childish, completely unacceptable bickering which even a pair of two-year-olds would be ashamed of," and then she said that if we didn't smarten up and start acting like adults she'd find us a nice couple of corners to stand in while we considered our actions."

How Orion kept a straight face until he reached his office, he didn't know. Once safely in his office, behind impenetrable silencing spells,

he howled with laughter. "She didn't," he chortled, wiping his eyes as he materialised inside Godric's Hollow.

"She did," Severus said sourly. "Not only that, but she said that the two corners she'd pick would be in the Great Hall, at dinner time."

Orion choked and coughed with laughter, almost cracking his head on the corner of the sofa as he slid off it. "Oh I wish I had known that. The blackmail potential would have been enormous."

"Watch it, Bambi, our sympathy for your situation might just disappear otherwise," James warned, and Orion frowned.

"Bambi?" he queried.

James looked a bit embarrassed. "It's what I used to call you as a baby. You were my fawn, my baby stag, and I gave you a nickname to match."

"It was better than Prongslet," Lily muttered, and Orion grinned as James pretended to be wounded.

"It actually sounds kind of nice," he murmured, rolling the name round in his mind and watched as his father smiled. He was then engulfed in a hug from James, followed soon after by Severus and Remus.

"Go on, you'd better get back to that grading. I like your style of doing it by the way. Nice and even," Remus said with a grin.

"And I love the vindictive nature of your comments when the idiot dunderheads don't listen and hand in rubbish," Severus added with a smirk.

Orion grinned, hugged everyone and opened his eyes, switching from mental communication to the task of grading essays with a

groan. He wished he'd never assigned a six-foot essay to the fifth-years, at six feet for more than twenty students – he'd be there all night. Sighing, he methodically continued to grade the essays, setting a timer so he'd know when it was dinner time. He didn't mind working through lunch, but he would need to be present at dinner.

The Marauders had changed their meeting place to the Room of Requirement to have better privacy for their discussion. Spreading out the parchment which they'd written their list of facts on, they peered at it intently.

"Remus, why did you drag us here?" Sirius complained.

"Several things," Remus said, tapping the list enthusiastically. "I think I figured out Dad's secret, and I want to figure out a way of helping him with his Voldemort problem."

The others stared at him, and then settled down on the couches the room had provided. "OK, so what's the big secret, and how did you figure it out?" James asked.

"I think our working theory is true, and if we're right, then we can really help him with Voldemort," Remus said, losing none of his enthusiasm. "I think we're all major parts of his life in the future, and that's why he's so protective of us."

"Yes, we get that Remy, but how did you figure it out, and why didn't you include us in the detective work?" Severus snapped, getting impatient with his brother's refusal to get to the point of what he was saying.

Remus growled at him, Moony closer to the surface than normal as a full moon was approaching. His eyes flashed amber and Severus raised his hands in surrender. "OK, sorry, I didn't mean to snap. Don't eat me, please. Dad wouldn't like it."

Remus chuckled and his eyes returned to their normal colour. "No, he wouldn't. I wouldn't fancy Moony's chances against that basilisk form of his either. Back to what I was saying though, I didn't include you in the detective work because there was none. I was looking at the list last night, and while I was asleep, things just sort of fell into place. Several facts seem to go together, and if you accept them as true then the secret is easy to work out."

"What facts?" James and Sirius chorused.

"First pair of facts, Dad's relationship with Severus in the future was rocky at first but got better later on. His relationship with his potions professor was antagonistic at first but got better later on. Does anyone see anything odd about that?"

"You think I could be his future potions professor?" Severus asked slowly, turning the facts over in his mind.

Remus nodded at his brother. "Yes. It makes sense; nearly all of the staff are former Hogwarts students, so if one of the current students became, say, a potions master, Dumbledore would want that student back to teach the next generation."

"That would mean that I wasn't a Marauder though," Severus pointed out, "and that I wouldn't be your brother, but your enemy. Also, if our working theory is true, and Dad really is a future Potter, then that would make James his father. If that's true, then what would Sirius' and your relationship be to him?"

They thought for a moment and then Remus looked up. "I think I might be that werewolf friend Dad mentioned, and Sirius would therefore be his godfather."

"You've forgotten one thing, well two really," Lily spoke up. "In this theory, who's his mother and who's the fourth Marauder if it isn't Severus?"

"You're his mother of course, if his eyes really are emerald green then you're the only person he could have inherited them from," Sirius replied, warming to the decidedly odd idea that Remus had introduced. "The fourth Marauder, well, I don't know that, but I don't think that matters."

They looked at the facts that Remus had laid out and then looked at each other. "It's almost unbelievable," James whispered, "but it does make sense. It would explain Dad's treatment of Uncle Orion, and the resemblance between them. It would also explain Uncle Orion's insistence that Voldemort and his Death Munchers die as soon as possible, he won't want Voldemort around in the future, nor would he want us to," he stopped suddenly and turned green.

"What?" the others asked, worried at his sudden colour change.

"I just realised," James said hoarsely. "If I'm Uncle Orion's father, and Lily is his mother, then we'll die sometime after leaving Hogwarts, murdered by Voldemort himself. No wonder Uncle Orion doesn't want to tell us."

Severus snorted. "You've forgotten something else," he said sarcastically. "Dad came back to the past to change it, remember? He's going round killing or imprisoning as many Death Eaters as he can, and I think he's aiming to kill Voldemort before we finish Hogwarts as well. He would want his parents to live and raise him like they should have done."

"True," James muttered. "What do we do now? Do we confront him with this theory, and ask if we're right?"

"Why not hold onto it?" Sirius suggested. "He's not told us yet either because of Voldemort or because he's trying to make revealing it a gigantic prank, but how cool would it be if, when he finally tells us what the secret is, we can say we knew ever since now. It would be

turning the prank back on him."

"The look on his face would be priceless," James chuckled, his mischievous nature appreciating the idea. "I think I know another reason why he didn't tell us now," he said after a few moments.

"What?" Lily asked.

"Well, what if we didn't believe him, and said that he couldn't be related to us. He'd see that as a rejection of our relationship, and it would hurt him horribly."

"That's true," Severus said with a frown, understanding James' point perfectly. "Of course, it would have been awkward for him to tell me too, I mean, can you imagine that conversation. "Hi, Severus, I'm one of your future students whom you hated when I was younger but when I was in seventh year you became my mentor." Yeah, that would be a really fun conversation."

"Not to mention me," Lily said. "Can you imagine if, after you'd introduced me, he'd said something along the lines of "Hi Mum, I'm your future son." That would really make things awkward."

She suddenly paled and Severus and James each immediately put an arm round her shoulders, hugging her gently. "What is it?" Severus asked, concerned.

"Where's that list," Lily whispered. Sirius passed it over and Lily scanned it. Finding the entry she was hoping she'd misread, she dropped it with a sob.

"Lily?"

"The list, your dad said that he lived with his aunt and uncle after his parents died." She looked up at James and said brokenly, "If we're his parents, that means that Petunia and whoever her future

husband is would be his aunt and uncle. They, didn't you say that they abused him, Severus?"

"I said that I thought they did based on what Dad's said about them," Severus replied carefully. "I don't think that would happen now, Lily, not when Dad's gone to such lengths to change your sister's view of magic. Remember that the future he knew most likely will change now, because of what he's done here. He's changed people's views, rescued me and Remus from less-than-nice childhoods, ensured that we don't fall into the pureblood snobbery crap, and he's doing everything he can to marginalize Voldemort."

"Not to mention he's done everything he can to prevent us from becoming enemies," James said with a slightly grim smile, nodding to Severus, who gave a brief nod in return.

"True. I wonder if our future selves were enemies because they both liked Lily's future self," he said, thinking out loud like he used to do when he was younger.

James snorted. "Maybe, but I'm sure the persecution Uncle Orion mentioned wouldn't have helped. It certainly explains his views on bullying though."

"Yeah, and his mini-lecture after our fight before the ball," Severus responded. He still thought it odd that his father was probably his future student, and his cousin's future son, but the theory fit all the available evidence, and his logical mind accepted it as fact unless some new evidence came along to disprove it, however illogical it might seem. He suddenly chuckled.

"What's so funny?" Remus asked.

"Have you realised that if we're right, James and Lily are technically our grandparents," Severus said.

Remus turned to look at his brother and then he looked down at the parchment where they'd scribbled their ideas as they'd said them.

"Oh dear," was all he said.

They chuckled as James pulled the parchment out of Remus' hands and mockingly wagged a finger at him. "Doodling on your homework? Now you're in trouble," he said with a stern look on his face. Remus jokingly hung his head, and then unexpectedly tackled James, knocking both of them off the couch and onto the floor. The shock on James' face as Remus pinned him to the floor was comical.

"You're not my grandfather yet," Remus said with a grin as he got off James and pulled him to his feet.

"Now that we've sorted this out, what was your idea for helping your dad?" Sirius asked, pulling them back to the second reason for their meeting.

Remus frowned as he sat back down on the couch next to Severus. "This is where I was hoping Severus would take the lead," he said pensively. "How could Voldemort get into Dad's mind, or try to anyway, when they've got to be several miles apart at least, if not hundreds of miles."

Severus found himself the focus of four intense stares and he shifted uneasily. He didn't like being the centre of attention; it went against his Slytherin nature. He preferred to be in the shadows, helping to orchestrate events like pranks from behind the scenes. The only exception to this was birthdays, which in the Potter family were noisy and happy affairs, where the birthday person was the centre of attention for most of the day, if not all of it.

"Well," he began slowly, organizing his thoughts, "the easiest way would be some sort of mental link. Dad and I have one due to the Occlumency lessons, but it's very weak. I could use it as an easy way

of getting to his shields in order to attack them, but I'd expend a lot of energy and he'd know I was doing it."

"What's another way?" James asked.

"Another sort of link, but I don't know any others which would give Voldemort the opportunity to attack Dad's mind," Severus replied reluctantly, hating his own ignorance of such an important matter.

"What about this," Lily said, holding out a book which she'd requested from the Room of Requirement. Severus took it and looked at the title.

Mental Bonds and Ways of Breaking Them

He paged through it and found nothing that would be helpful for them. Throwing it aside with a huff, he looked morosely at the ceiling. "Even if they have a mental link, we can't break it through wishing it out of existence," he muttered. "What are we going to do?"

"We could form another link with Uncle Orion and use it to help him break Voldemort's link with him," James suggested.

"How do you suggest we do that? Even the link I have with him is too weak to do that, so how do you propose we do it?" Severus snapped back.

"We could do a protection ritual," Sirius suggested. "It would form a link between the protectors and the protected, and if we're all his family, well, you three love him already and Lily and I care about him because he's the father of two of our best friends and the uncle of the third."

"But he forbade us to do that ritual, he'd never agree to it. There's no one else we could use as an anchor, because the anchor is also in this case the one we need to protect," Lily argued back. "He'd be

furious if he found out, and what if it doesn't work? Are we sure it's a mental link between him and Voldemort?"

"It's the most likely option, and we don't need to tell him. All we need to do is set things up, and get him here at a pre-arranged time. We'll have started the ritual and he'll come in at the right time to take up his role in it. Hopefully, once it's complete, Voldemort will be kicked out of Dad's head forever," Severus said, rubbing his hands together in anticipation.

"And what about us?" James asked. "What will happen to us? I'm not talking about what Uncle Orion will do to us; I'm talking about what the side effects of the ritual are. Will we be bonded to Uncle Orion permanently?"

Severus was looking at the book they'd found the protection ritual in, provided courtesy of the Room of Requirement. "It says that we'll be bonded to him but only lightly, and we can dissolve the bond once there's no need for it anymore."

With conclusions reached and a plan of action settled on, the Marauders settled down to study, all of them intent on what they were doing. Had they known what Orion had known since his eleventh birthday they might not have been so confident in their plans.

When it came to Harry Potter, nothing ever went according to plan.

Author Note

Hi everyone. I just added this note to say that work is due to become very hectic soon so I might not have much time to write apart from on the weekends. I will keep writing, and the next Chronicles story will be up shortly, probably next weekend, if not tomorrow. Imperial Phoenix has been put on fast track thanks to a polite request for it to be the next one I focus on, but all my others are being worked on. I'm just trying to work out how to write Imperial Phoenix so it doesn't end

up as a Star Wars version of Dark Apprentice.

Hope everyone has a good week and may the Force be with you

Padawan Lynne

Chapter Forty: Good Intentions and Broken Bonds

The Marauders researched their chosen ritual thoroughly, making sure they had everything planned down to the last detail. It was that last detail that was currently giving them trouble, and they'd been stuck for two weeks trying to find a way round it. The problem was that the ritual called for all the participants to willingly give some blood for it, and while the Marauders were all OK with it, the amount was only a small one after all, three drops for each participant, they couldn't find any way of convincing Orion to donate his blood without telling him what they were doing. Telling him what they were doing was out of the question, he'd ban it before they could even explain their reasons for doing it.

They were currently in the Room of Requirement, thinking up ideas and discarding them just as quickly. Ideas such as slipping a potion into his drink to knock him out and then taking his blood covertly were dismissed, as the participant had to be conscious and willing when the blood was given. Also, any potions in the blood would ruin the ritual. Also dismissed was the idea of telling him it was for a potion – he knew all the blood-based potions and wouldn't believe the excuse for a second. Sighing, they glared at the book which was open at the page the ritual was on, and then looked at each other helplessly.

"We're going to have to tell him, it's the only way," James said despairingly.

"Maybe not," Severus said thoughtfully. "You remember that a lot of potions exploded yesterday, and we had to go and get treated for burns." His audience nodded, they'd all had various burns from the exploding potions splashing over them, and Orion, hearing about what had happened, had shown up in the infirmary to check they were all OK. Severus rolled his head from side to side, loosening a few tense muscles and continued, "I was the last student to be treated and Madam Pomfrey confined me to a bed so she could get a new jar of burn paste. I heard her discussing something with Dad

while she got the paste so I eavesdropped on the conversation. She was trying to get him to allow her to do a full check-up on him, which includes blood tests. He wasn't too keen on having his blood taken, but finally allowed it, as long as after she was finished with it, it was destroyed."

"Yes, and," James said, beginning to see what was going through his cousin's mind.

"Dad's going for that check-up today, if we manage to take one of the vials, we can use it in the ritual, and he won't have to be told anything," Severus said enthusiastically.

"How are we going to keep both him and Madam Pomfrey from noticing that there's a vial missing?" Sirius enquired.

Severus withdrew a small vial from his pocket, the same size as the ones that were used for blood tests. Producing a small knife, he nicked his finger and let the blood flow into the vial until it was full. Capping it, he healed the cut with a spell and held up the vial.

"One decoy vial. Take the real vial, and drop this one on the floor. Madam Pomfrey and Dad will think we accidentally knocked one of his vials off the table, and she'll just take another. We get the blood we need and we don't have to answer any awkward questions."

The others were looking at him in amazement. "That is brilliant, Sev," Remus said admiringly.

Severus couldn't help looking a bit smug as he answered, "Yes, it was, wasn't it."

"Oh shut up," James and Sirius grumbled while Lily and Remus chuckled. Severus was so serious at times that it was refreshing to see him making jokes and acting a bit silly.

"So, how are we going to distract Dad and Madam Pomfrey?" Remus asked.

"That won't be a problem," Lily said, entering into the conversation. Now that they were committed to the plan, she saw no reason to hold back and not do her part. She was under no illusions that Orion would be pleased with them – she fully expected the professor to be absolutely furious with them – but there was no other way if they wanted to help him. Besides, she wanted to know if they were right about Orion being her and James' son, and the blood they didn't use for the ritual could be saved and used in a paternity test if they chose to do one. "If there's blood tests involved, that means needles. I'm OK with seeing blood, but I faint around needles. I can provide the needed distraction – they'll be so worried about me fainting that one of you can steal the vial of blood that we need."

The boys stared at her with a mixture of shock and admiration. "Well done, Lily," Severus said, hugging her tightly. Before he could think about it, he gave her a quick kiss on the cheek. Blushing slightly, he pulled away, but didn't stop looking at her. For her part, Lily was surprised at the unexpected kiss but not unhappy. Smiling, she hugged him back, and even returned the kiss, quickly and softly before letting him go again.

"Severus and Lily sitting in a tree," Remus began wickedly, yelping when Severus threw a Stinging hex at him with unerring accuracy. "Alright, I give up, stop it," he said as Severus threw several more Stinging hexes at him. Tucking his wand back up his sleeve, Severus smirked at his brother.

"Next time I might throw a Silver Dart curse," he warned, and Remus gulped. His brother usually didn't make such pointed references to his lycanthropy; much less threaten to use a curse which would harm him so badly. He knew that Severus loved him, but he was very prickly when it came to any hint of teasing about the affectionate way he treated Lily.

"So, now that we have the distraction sorted, let's go and get the blood," Sirius said eagerly, not at all worried about the minor spat between Remus and Severus.

"Er, what's our reason for suddenly showing up?" James asked.

"What about that discussion we wanted to have with him two weeks ago, we never did manage to get him alone," Remus suggested, and the others immediately nodded in agreement. With everything now planned, they disposed of any evidence that could potentially incriminate them. The ritual book was returned to Lily's trunk, where it lay buried under all her own books and assorted other things that the boys didn't want to know about. With everything else safely put away, and the parchment with their Secret theory on it spelled to look like careless doodles stuffed into James' pocket, they headed for the infirmary.

As they got there, they were treated to the entertaining sight of Orion going toe-to-toe with Madam Pomfrey over a medical test which he didn't think fell under the heading of "general check-up." They crept to the door and peered round it, just in time to see Orion grumpily lie down on the bed and submit to Madam Pomfrey running her wand over his forehead.

"I do not need a mental health check," he grumbled as the Marauders entered the infirmary.

"From the way you've been going into one dangerous situation after another, Mr Potter, I would have to disagree with you," was Poppy's sharp reply. Orion growled a bit as his spirit family burst into laughter and gave their own opinions on his mental health as well. Spotting the young Marauders, he smiled in relief.

"What a welcome sight," he said as they sat down around his bed. "Come to cheer me up, have you?"

"That and finally talk about the future," James said, smiling at his uncle, and firmly shoving away any thoughts that the man in front of him could be his son. He didn't want his uncle finding out how much time they spent pondering his secret, and he definitely didn't want him knowing what theory they'd come up with.

"Oh? What do you want to know?" Orion asked, keeping his tone light, but inside, he was wary about what questions they might throw at him.

Thankfully, they started out innocently enough.

"What was the worst trouble you got into as a student?" James asked.

Orion thought about it for a few minutes, and was startled when Remus asked, "Dad, why aren't you answering? Isn't it a simple question?"

"Not really," Orion admitted, drawing a chuckle from his audience. "I think the worst trouble would have to be the unsanctioned duel between myself and my former best friend while in the infirmary."

"What?!" the Marauders exclaimed, and Orion grinned sheepishly.

"I was in the infirmary recovering after my former best friend had tried to poison me, and he had been brought in suffering from a severe combination of hexes and curses thrown by those students who knew about what he'd done and who were furious with him for almost killing me. After the hexes and such were removed, he got up and said he wanted to apologise to me. My mentor, who was checking to see that I was recovering as expected, rather grudgingly allowed it, but I wasn't sure. I was proven right when the idiot – my former best friend, not my mentor – cast a rather nasty curse at me, which, if it had hit, would have almost certainly killed me. I rolled out of bed and

threw several curses back, three of which hit their target, before the duel was stopped."

"So why did you get in trouble? It sounds like self-defence to me," Remus said.

Orion smiled grimly. "I threw the same Dark Arts curse at my former friend that he'd thrown at me. The difference was that his missed, and mine didn't. I almost killed him because I used a spell that I didn't know the effects of beforehand. That was what I got in trouble for."

"Ouch," Remus muttered, conceding that maybe his father had deserved to get in trouble for that. "How old were you?"

"Seventeen," Orion replied.

"Why did you take so long to answer the question before?" Lily asked.

Orion chuckled. "Well, my list of detention-worthy acts started in first year and only got worse as I got older. I also started off my criminal career at the tender age of eleven as well."

"Criminal career?" James asked, a bit shocked.

His uncle nodded. "If the Ministry had known half the stuff I got up to at school, I'd have been taking my OWLs in the juvenile section of Azkaban, I'm sure, and probably my NEWTs from a proper Azkaban cell. Let's see, there was dragon smuggling in first year, breaking the Statute of Secrecy by flying a car to school in second year as well as illegally brewing Polyjuice Potion in that same year, helping a convicted murderer to escape the Ministry's clutches in my third year, hmm, oh yes then there was speaking out against accepted Ministry propaganda, refusing to obey Ministry officials and generally inciting rebellion in my fifth year."

By the time he'd finished speaking, the students' eyes were as round as saucers. "Did no one do anything to stop you?" Severus queried, stunned.

Orion shrugged. "I was punished for those events if that's what you're asking, but if you're asking whether I had guardians who cared enough to put a stop to my risk-taking and rule breaking then, regrettably, no. The punishments I got were school ones, not parental ones, and they resulted in quite a thick file listing all my detentions for various offences. I will say that most of what I got up to was actually me trying to help my friends. I didn't break the rules for the fun of it, I just saw them as, er, inconveniences which got in the way at the time. My godfather and surrogate uncle helped with the rebellion in my fifth year because the Ministry was in the wrong, but they did put their collective feet down on several other issues which, after some arguing, I reluctantly accepted."

In Godric's Hollow, Sirius snorted, and said in aside to James, Lily, and Severus, "He means he ran into parental authority for the first time in his life and lost," causing the other spirits to snort in amusement.

Back in the infirmary, Orion eyed the younger Marauders sternly and added, "By the time I had my own children, I had grown up and if they'd tried anything like what I had, I wouldn't have brushed it off lightly. They'd have been in serious trouble, not only with me, but also their mother, which if anything; I think would have been much worse for them."

Both versions of the Marauders laughed at that, and Orion grinned, leaning back into his pillows and watching as Madam Pomfrey ran the last of the diagnostic scans with her wand. "Just the blood to go and then I'll let you out of here," she said, turning to get the required equipment.

Orion had his attention focused on her so didn't see the sudden tenseness of his young audience. If he had, he might have been more suspicious, but as it was, when he finally returned his attention to them, nothing seemed out of the ordinary. The Marauders, for their part, had almost forgotten their true purpose for being there, they'd been enjoying the chance to talk with Orion when he was relaxed and open to discussing his past, or rather, the future, and the mention of the blood tests had abruptly reminded them of their plan.

Lily eyed the equipment with trepidation, although she wasn't the one who would be giving blood, the sight of the needle that the mediwitch was holding was still frightening. Forcing herself to remain calm – she couldn't faint yet, they needed at least two vials of blood to be on the trolley before she did – she turned her head so she didn't have to see the needle enter Orion's arm.

"It's in if that's the problem," Orion said unexpectedly, his gentle touch on her arm bringing her head round again so she was looking at him.

"I've never been good with needles," she admitted with a blush.

Orion smiled sympathetically. "No one really likes them; I'm always amazed that the magical world hasn't developed a way of doing blood tests without needing to use needles to get it. Are you OK now?"

Lily looked at the small table where two vials of blood sat, and then she made the apparent mistake of looking down to see whether the withdrawal had finished. The next second, her eyes had rolled back in her head and she'd fallen off her chair in a dead faint.

Several things happened at once, Madam Pomfrey immediately stopped drawing blood to tend to Lily while James, Sirius and Remus crowded round her, and there was a crash as Severus knocked into the trolley in his rush to get to Lily as well. In the confusion, no one

noticed Severus' sleight of hand as he picked up one of the vials of his father's blood while dropping the decoy vial on the floor. The fact that the second vial of Orion's blood had fallen on the floor as well added to the apparent authenticity of the accident, as the blood from both vials was intermixed and it was impossible to tell which blood had come from which vial.

A few minutes later, Lily had woken up, the blood had been vanished, the area sterilized with a series of spells, and the Marauders had been politely asked to leave while Orion had new vials of blood taken. Orion promised to finish their conversation later that day, and told them to do what Madam Pomfrey said. Sighing, he'd then submitted to having three new vials taken and after that amused himself by reading the latest DADA publications. The sarcastic comments he made about the authors of the articles caused a lot of laughter in Godric's Hollow while he waited for the results of his tests.

In the Room of Requirement, Severus was proudly showing off the blood that he'd liberated from the infirmary. Delighted by their success, they immediately began setting up the ritual. They weren't going to do it until a few hours later, but the set-up took time, and they were betting that the large surge of magic produced by the ritual would bring Orion to them without them needing to send a note. With the set-up complete, they sat down and contemplated what they were going to do. They weren't just disobeying Orion; they were breaking a few laws as well.

"What did Dad say he saw the rules as, when he was helping his friends?" Remus asked idly.

"Inconveniences which got in the way," James answered immediately, "but he mostly stuck to school stuff, the only really major law he broke was the statute of secrecy, and from what he said, Dumbledore dealt with it as a school matter. This is different."

"How?" Lily asked.

Severus looked momentarily conflicted and then sighed. "We don't know exactly what the ritual will do. Dad will most probably try to block our invasion of his mind which might seriously hurt him. I want to help him, but I don't like the idea that we might end up doing more harm than good."

"Doesn't the ritual magic negate all mental defences so the bond can be formed?" Sirius enquired, reaching for the book once again. Severus took it from him and reread the ritual, frowning.

"It does," he said, handing it back to Sirius, who looked down at the passage Severus had indicated. Continuing, Severus added, "I just have this feeling that something might happen which we didn't expect."

"We can't stop now, we've got all this set up, and we stole Dad's blood," Remus said practically. When his brother glared at him, he said, "Come on, Sev, we can't back out. The ritual says it's safe, and it's a minor one. I care about Dad too, I don't want to hurt him, but Voldemort's hurting him more. We need to do this so Voldemort doesn't end up killing Dad through that link."

"And the thought that we might do the exact same thing doesn't bother you?" Severus demanded. "We're breaking some of the most important laws there are here, not to mention deliberately disobeying Dad. Yes, we're trying to help him, but how do you think he's going to see it? The ritual says it's safe, but all rituals carry some degree of risk, such as what happens if Dad doesn't show up. The magic will kill us and that will destroy Dad faster than Voldemort will."

"Are you really having second thoughts?" Lily asked softly.

Severus looked at her and then looked away. "Yes and no," he admitted. "I want to get rid of the link he's got with Voldemort, but I

don't want to hurt or maybe kill him in the process. As well as that, when he began teaching me Occlumency back in first year, he taught me all the rules regarding the mental arts. We're breaking the most important rule of all – don't meddle with someone's mind unless you have no other choice, and then only with that person's explicit consent." He looked worried as he added, "If we all survive the ritual, Dad's going to kill us, extremely slowly."

"No he won't, he loves us. Plus, if we're right we need to survive for him to exist in the future," James said authoritatively.

Severus and Remus looked at each other, and then at James. "Fine," Severus finally said. "But if things go wrong, we'll say that you were the one who pushed for us to go ahead, even when we had second thoughts."

James looked irritated. "Come on, you were just as happy as the rest of us until you started actually thinking about the implications of what we're doing. Just think about how happy Uncle Orion will be when he's free of the Dork Lord."

Severus smirked at James' nickname for Voldemort and relaxed. "OK. Is it time?"

James looked at his watch and nodded. "Yes, it's time. Let's go."

As they gathered round in a circle, no one noticed that the book was open to the wrong page.

Orion was enjoying a cup of tea with Professor McGonagall when a large surge of magic knocked both of them out of their chairs. Orion winced as Voldemort chose to try another assault on his shields just as a second surge of magic threatened to flatten both himself and McGonagall. Picking himself up, he shook his head and gasped "Room of Requirement, it's coming from there."

He took off at a run, not bothering to answer McGonagall's query about how he knew that. Racing to the room, he entered it, and saw the Marauders, and Lily standing in a circle which they'd set up previously. Recognising that they'd begun a ritual, but not which one it was, Orion knew that he had to be the anchor for it, he was the only one powerful enough to contain the magic which was swirling round the room.

"Dad, hurry," Remus and Severus groaned, opening their eyes to peer blurrily at him. Knowing that he had very little time to act, Orion stepped forward and joined the circle. As soon as he did, James pushed a goblet of liquid at him. "Drink it," his future father urged, and Orion drank, realizing that it had to be part of whatever was going on. He didn't have time for another thought as the magic surged into and through him, before spreading round the circle, binding them all together.

The Marauders all cried out in pain as they were abruptly sucked into Orion's mind, landing in what looked like the Hogwarts Great Hall with a hard thud. As they got to their feet, there was a crash, as something broke through the mental windows and landed near them. Looking around, the younger Marauders gasped as Voldemort's mental self rose to his feet and stalked towards them with an evil smile.

"Thank you so much for weakening his shields enough for me to get in," he said. "Now, where is he? I want to kill him, but first, I think I'll kill you."

"No you won't!" a voice snapped and the five students spun round to see Orion's mental self standing at the door, his wand in his hand. Striding forward, Orion put himself in between Voldemort and his disobedient family members and snarled, "Get out of my head, Tom. You don't belong here and I certainly don't want you here. Go!"

"No, I don't think I will," Voldemort said before throwing a spell at

Orion with such speed that it was shocking to the students when Orion not only deflected the spell but sent one of his own back. As the battle began in earnest, the Marauders began to creep towards the door.

"Go out the door and along to where my office would usually be. I'll be along shortly," Orion growled from behind them while deflecting Voldemort's latest hex. Taking this as permission, the Marauders ran for the mental door and went through it, shutting it behind them.

"Now where," Severus asked. He'd never been this far into his father's mind before and wasn't sure which way to go.

"This way, can't you feel the dark magic from up ahead," James said, beginning to run. The others followed and they were soon at the point where the bond originated. It was pulsing with energy and felt wrong to the five students, but as much as they wanted to be rid of it, they didn't quite know how to do it."

"We have to cut it off, get rid of the bits which are holding it here," Severus said, looking around for help.

"How," Lily asked, looking at the bond, pulsing with dark magic, which made all of them feel sick.

"Like this," James said determinedly, and he grasped hold of the bond and began trying to tear it apart. The others came to help him, but despite their best efforts, the bond refused to break.

"Come on you stupid thing," Remus growled. "We're not going to let you hurt Dad any more!" He thought of everything Orion had done for him, and how much he loved him. Suddenly, he felt a surge of magic pass through him and attack the bond.

"What did you do?" Severus asked, shocked.

"I thought of how much I loved Dad and that I wanted the bond to go away," Remus answered.

"That's it!" Sirius said excitedly. "Voldy can't stand love, it's his weakness. Everyone, focus on how much we care for Professor Potter. Let's go."

The Marauders looked at each other and then at the bond. Focusing on the love, or, in Sirius and Lily's cases, the odd attachment they felt to him, magic began to swirl round them. Gold in colour, it surrounded and attacked the bond, slowly dissolving it.

"NO!" a voice yelled and a powerful blast of magic threw them away from the bond. Voldemort rushed up to them, furious at what they were doing. "How dare you!"

"Stay away from them!" Orion snarled, a shield snapping up between the Marauders and Voldemort. Putting himself between his family and the Dark Lord, Orion growled at Voldemort. "Get out of my head you bastard!" he said menacingly.

"No!" Voldemort hissed. A blast of magic threw Orion away from both the bond and the Marauders. The Dark Lord strode over to him and smiled. "Goodbye, Potter," he said coldly.

"NOOOO!" Severus and Remus screamed in unison. Acting on instinct, they attacked the bond, and before their eyes, it disintegrated.

Voldemort let out a scream of pain as Orion rolled out of the way of his attack, and rose shakily to his feet. "I've told you before," he said wearily, "to Get. Out. Of. My. Head."

Gathering the last of his strength, Orion threw it at Voldemort. The Dark Lord screamed as he was forcefully ejected from Orion's mind,

and shields snapped into place preventing his return. At the same time there was another large surge of magic as the bonds between Orion and the Marauders which had formed during the ritual now solidified. The Marauders groaned as they felt themselves being pulled back to their own bodies and a sharp cry of pain escaped all of them as hot, burning pain accompanied the forming of a tattoo on their right forearms.

All that was nothing however, when compared to the blast of magic which shook the castle and blew out all the windows in the infirmary as Orion slumped down in his bed. The machine monitoring his heartbeat and other vital signs let out a sharp squeal and emitted a low-pitched beep as the screen showed a distressing sight.

The continuous beep was accompanied by a flat line, and Orion was showing no other sign of life.

Chapter Forty-One: Expected and Unexpected Consequences

For a moment no one in the infirmary moved, all stuck to their chairs, willing the machine to start beeping again, willing the flat line to start rising into peaks once more. As it stubbornly remained flat, there were two heartbroken cries from Remus and Severus as they leapt on Orion's bed and begged him to wake up. When there was no response, they tried an Ennervate spell. Poppy brushed them aside and tried every medical spell she knew, including one which delivered the magical equivalent of an electrical shock to the heart. When everything she tried produced no results she checked his pulse one last time just to be sure and then stepped away from the bed, wiping her eyes surreptitiously.

"He's gone. I'm so sorry," she said to the grief-stricken boys.

Remus and Severus broke into a fresh flood of tears and jumped back up on the bed, begging Orion to wake up, to come back to them. They felt a touch on their shoulders and turned to see Charles standing just beside the bed, looking down at them with a sympathetic expression on his face.

"He's gone boys. There's nothing you can do," he said, pulling them off the bed and hugging them.

Remus and Severus clung to him, shaking their heads in denial. Charles sat down on a nearby bed and just held them, knowing that now was not the time for an in-depth discussion of what had happened to cause this distressing turn of events. He and Emma, along with Lily's parents and Sirius' father had been called to Hogwarts when Orion and their children were brought to the infirmary, so they were there when Orion died, although they hadn't been informed of what had happened to cause it. James was currently being cuddled by Emma, and was as devastated as his cousins. Sirius and Lily were being supported by their respective parents, who were waiting for an explanation of what they were doing there and

how they were involved.

Eventually, Poppy turned off the machine and covered Orion's body with a sheet. She turned to Severus and Remus and patted their shoulders sympathetically. "I'm sorry," she whispered before leaving the family alone. Sirius and Lily came over to offer support and Severus, Remus and James turned to them. The five fell together onto the bed in a tangled pile of bodies so it was impossible for the adults to tell exactly who was hugging whom. They all seemed to be hugging each other.

Finally the pile on the bed sorted itself back into the Marauders. Looking completely lost and alone, Severus and Remus looked up at Charles and asked shakily, "Where will we stay now?"

Understanding what they were really asking, Charles pulled them into another hug and said, "No matter what, you're still part of the family. Orion adopted you, and that's good enough for me. You're Potters, and we don't turn our backs on family."

"When you hear what happened you might reconsider that," Remus muttered.

"What do you mean?" Emma asked.

"He means that it's our fault Uncle Orion's dead," James choked out, unable to look at the sheet-covered body lying so still on the bed. "It's our fault and we didn't even get to tell him what we figured out."

"How is it your fault?" Daniel asked intently, breaking into the conversation. He and Rose were as horrified and deeply upset over Orion's death as the Potters were, after all, he was their grandson too, but they were interested in why the Marauders thought it was their fault.

Slowly, haltingly, and with many interruptions and explanations, the

Marauders and Lily told their parents of their detective work regarding Orion's secret and their eventual conclusion. They also told them of their meeting with Orion when he'd had the Voldemort-induced headache. Their explanation of the ritual brought frowns to the adults' faces, but they didn't say anything, saving their reactions until the story was finished. When they explained how they'd cut the link and Orion had thrown Voldemort out of his mind, Charles went rigid and looked speculatively at his grandson's body. If his grandson's death had brought about Voldemort's too then as painful as they were finding it he somehow thought that Orion wouldn't be too upset with the knowledge that he'd taken Voldemort with him.

"Um, Madam Pomfrey, are you sure Orion's dead?" Rose asked, staring at the bed.

"Yes, why?" the nurse replied, perplexed.

"Because, the sheet's moving," Rose said, staring at the sheet, which gave a definite twitch.

Now everyone was staring at the sheet with morbid fascination. Suddenly there was a groan from underneath the white material and Orion sat up. Looking around, he spotted his audience and said conversationally, "So, what have I missed?"

"Orion?" Charles asked, unable to believe his eyes.

"Yes," Orion said. Spotting the Marauders his face went blank and his eyes turned ice-cold.

Further conversation was stopped as Emma and Rose tried to smother him with hugs. Orion didn't mind, he clung to them as tightly as they were clinging to him. When they eventually let him go, Daniel came over and Orion hugged him as tightly as he'd hugged his grandmothers. Charles was last, and as he looked at Orion, he was

startled to see powerful longing in his grandson's eyes. Sitting on the edge of the bed, he found himself caught in a tight, almost desperate hug. Hugging him back, he felt the minute shivers which Orion was trying to hide, and he hugged him until he felt the shivers stop. When he let Orion go, the longing was gone, and in its place was a brief flash of powerful grief. When that dissipated, the blank mask was back and Charles stepped away from the bed and sat down beside Emma.

"Dad?" Severus asked cautiously before wincing as the mark on his right forearm flared with pain.

Orion raked a scathing glare over the Marauders. "What. Did. You. Do?" he growled.

The Marauders exchanged glances. Orion's voice was so cold, so stern that they were beginning to think that they'd made a mistake in believing that he would forgive them. Apparently they'd taken too long to answer because Orion said, "Well?" His tone reminded them of a whip and the Marauders winced. If he was angry now, what would his mood be when they finished their explanation?

"Dad, we just wanted to help," Remus said, wincing the same way Severus had as his own mark flared with pain. Noticing this, Orion held out his hand.

"Give me your arm," Orion said. His voice was still cold, but Remus knew that however angry his father was, he wouldn't do anything by way of punishment until he'd calmed down. Accordingly, he held out his arm for examination and watched as his sleeve was rolled up, exposing the mark.

"I assume this was left by the ritual," Orion said, looking at the mark closely. It was a rather pleasing design if he didn't think of exactly why it was present on his son's arm. Touching the mark, he felt an answering pulse on his own arm and dropped Remus' to roll up his

own sleeve. There, in exactly the same place on his forearm, was the same mark. A basilisk and a lion coiled around each other, with a lightning bolt slashing down the middle between them. The lion was a deep golden color, and the basilisk was done in a poisonous shade of green. The lightning bolt was pure silver and everything was edged in black.

"Let me see your arms," he said sharply. The Marauders all rolled up their right sleeves and displayed their forearms. Five marks stood out in sharp relief against their skin, and Orion growled, the sound clearly audible.

"What. Did. You. Do?" he all but snarled at them, repeating his earlier question.

Shakily, the Marauders gave him a full explanation, including their theory of what his secret was. When they were finished, Orion was scowling and the Marauders were looking at the floor, unable to meet his piercing, furious gaze.

"Look at me," Orion finally growled. When they looked up at him, he let his piercing glare rest on each of them for a minute before saying, "Get me that book and then leave. I don't want to discuss this until I'm sure I know what we're dealing with and what the possible side effects are."

The cold, emotionless way he spoke made everyone shiver.

"Uncle Orion," James started, flinching slightly at the pain in his mark, "did we succeed? Are we right?"

Orion glared at him. "I don't believe you deserve to hear the answer to those questions right now. Just get me that book and then leave."

Silently, the Marauders left the infirmary, retrieved the ritual book and returned to the infirmary. Taking it from them, Orion allowed Sirius to

point out which ritual they did the set up for, and which ritual they used the words from. When he was sure he had the right rituals he directed an even fiercer glare at the Marauders, allowing the power of it to drive them backwards and out of the room.

When they'd left, Orion handed the book to Charles. "Could you please make a copy of those two rituals, each on a separate piece of parchment," he requested.

"OK, but why not do it yourself?" Charles asked.

Orion grimaced. "The ritual did something to my magic, it's stronger, and feels wilder. I don't want to risk casting anything until I'm sure that my magic's settled down."

At that moment, Poppy came over and began running diagnostic scans on him. "You're right, Mr Potter. Your magic has indeed grown stronger. The barrier you put round it has broken, meaning that all your magic is flowing through you instead of only a fraction like you're used to."

"What does that mean?" Emma asked.

Poppy conjured a feather and laid it down in front of Orion. "Levitate this like you used to do," she said.

Picking up his wand which was on the bedside table, Orion flicked it at the feather. "Wingardium leviosa!" he said.

There was a CRACK! as the feather shot up and went through the ceiling. Distant sounds of destruction heralded its passing through several more as well and Orion closed his eyes with a sigh. "Get me in a fight with Voldemort and you won't have any problems, I'll just blow him up," he said resignedly.

"All it means is you have to be careful of the amount of power you put

into a spell," Emma said comfortingly. "Let's not focus on that right now. What did our respective children do exactly?"

Orion glared at nothing in particular and stabbed the parchments viciously. "They combined two rituals, one of which is the one that Voldemort uses to bind his Death Eaters to him. He uses a twisted version of it, and our children used the original so I'm not sure what the outcome will be. We need to figure out what the bond they've formed with me was originally designed to do, and whether the combination of rituals has changed the effect."

"What are the effects of each ritual when used separately?" Orion Black asked.

Orion gave him the two pages and dropped his head into his hands. "I only have a vague idea of that, unfortunately. Regardless of what the separate effects are though, we have to find out what combining them might have done. Only then will we be able to deal with it."

"OK. I'll talk to Dumbledore, maybe he has something which could help us," Charles said. He stood and then paused, looking at Orion intently. "What do you want to do with our respective children?"

Orion scowled. "I don't know. I need to think about it. What are you planning on doing?"

Charles looked at Emma and shrugged. "We'll come up with our own punishment for James, but we acknowledge the fact that you have the right to punish him for what he did to you. Our punishment will be secondary and will most likely compliment yours."

Orion looked at Daniel and Rose, who nodded in agreement with Charles, and then looked at Orion Black, who nodded as well. Sighing, he said, "You might as well bring Dumbledore here, I'm not moving from the infirmary until Poppy says I can and we need to get this latest mess sorted out as quickly as possible. If he can offer any

insight at all, I'd be grateful."

Charles nodded and left. Soon afterwards, he returned with Dumbledore, and the research began.

The Marauders had congregated down in the dungeons, the bleak cold surroundings fitting their mood exactly. Sinking to the floor, they huddled together, not talking, each finding comfort in having their friends nearby. Their contemplation of their possible fate was broken when Salazar Slytherin called down to them.

"What are the five of you doing down here?" the Founder asked curiously.

Severus looked up and Salazar was shocked to see a hopeless look in his eyes, combined with grief and self-loathing. When the rest of the Marauders also looked at him, the same look was in their eyes as well.

"What's wrong?" Salazar asked, his tone a bit softer.

"Dad hates us," Remus said with a sniff. "We tried to help him and all we ended up doing is ruining everything."

"I'm sure that's not the case," Salazar said reassuringly. "Tell me what happened and I might be able to help."

Once he'd heard the tale, he was frowning thoughtfully. "Do not doubt your father's love for you," he said to Severus and Remus. "He may well be utterly furious with you right now and he has good cause to be, but I'm sure he still loves you. About the ritual combination, Godric and I may be able to help. Rituals were common in our day and we sometimes combined two or even three to get our desired result. We never combined the two you used, but I do know what each one was designed to do."

"So what should we do?" James asked.

"Tell Orion that Godric and I wish to speak with him regarding the rituals. Then I suggest you return to your common rooms and do some homework or something to take your mind off today's events."

The Marauders nodded and slowly got up off the cold floor. "Which one of us should pass on the message?" Sirius asked.

"I will, after all, it's from Lord Slytherin," Severus said. Nodding, the others left him and headed up to Gryffindor Tower. As they gave the password and entered the common room, they found it mercifully empty. Hurrying up the stairs to their dorm room, they collapsed on their beds, Lily sitting on Remus' bed beside him, and wondered whether they'd ever be forgiven. Back in his room in the Slytherin dormitory where he'd gone after delivering Salazar's message, Severus wondered the same thing.

Two weeks later, the Marauders each received a note from Orion. They all said the same thing apart from the different names.

Come to my room after dinner.

Orion

Short and to the point, there was nothing in them to suggest what mood Orion was in when he wrote them, nor was there anything to suggest what he might be intending to do regarding their inevitable punishment. Swallowing hard, they put the notes away and looked at each other. Dinner was several hours away and there were still classes to go to. End of year exams were also drawing near so they'd been attempting to study for those as well.

"And the worst thing is we've got Defence last," Severus moaned.

While the Marauders were agonizing over what might happen later,

Orion was meeting with Charles, Emma, Daniel, Rose, and Orion Black, who were all a bit mystified as to why he'd called them. The strange smile he was wearing didn't reassure them either.

"Orion, what's going on?" Charles asked as they sat down.

Orion smiled grimly. "I've come to a decision on what punishment I want to give them," he said. "I just need you to cooperate with Dumbledore and myself in putting on a small show for our wayward offspring."

"Small show?" Orion Black queried. "What show would this be?"

Orion stepped aside as his visitors entered his lounge area and moved over to the desk. Dumbledore was already in the room, reclining in one of the armchairs. As they all sat down, Orion looked directly at each one of the other parents.

"First I have a question for you," he said. "Do any of you remember what the punishments here used to be like before Albus became the Headmaster?"

The shivers which ran round the room answered his question quite well. "Yes," Charles said. "Bloody draconic and evil they were too."

"So you wouldn't support it if I suggested reinstating corporal punishment just for this case?"

"Absolutely not!" Charles snapped. "Please tell me you're not suggesting that."

Orion shook his head and grinned wolfishly. "Of course not. I detest the idea myself. No, the idea is that we let them think that that's what's going to happen, and offer them a way out with the real punishment I've devised for them."

"So, what, you stand there holding it and, threaten them with it?" Rose asked, eyeing the cane on Orion's desk with dislike.

"Not exactly," Orion replied. "No, I just stand there and say that the Headmaster wanted to reinstate it for what they did, and describe in minute detail exactly what it would feel like. Then, when they inevitably begin to plead for anything else other than that, I pull out the real punishment. I don't think they'll complain overly much, do you?"

"That is evil, Orion," Daniel said, shaking his head in disbelief. "Are you going to let them think that you supported Professor Dumbledore's idea?"

Orion shook his head. "No. No, if I do that, it's quite likely that they'll begin to be afraid of me and I don't want that. I want them to realize what could have happened if I wasn't as nice as I am, but I also want them to appreciate the severity of their actions.

"One last question," Emma said. As Orion turned to her she said, "What is the real punishment you've worked out for them?"

Orion sat down. "I don't know about James, Sirius, or Lily but Severus and Remus are grounded for the whole summer, and they're going to be spending that time trying to help me find a way to break this bond. They're also not permitted to use their brooms and their pocket money will be cut in half for that time as well. I will also be confirming their deductive work purely for the purpose of making them feel guiltier about killing me. I'd like it if James, Sirius and Lily could also come over for the research part of it, as they helped in forming it they should be involved in finding a way to break it. Plus, if it can't be broken, then I'd like to determine the exact limitations of the bond, to find out what we can and can't do with it, and how much control I have over them."

"That sounds reasonable," Daniel said after some thought. "I assume

the usual rule of no friends while grounded is being relaxed in this case."

Orion nodded. "It's a bit pointless to separate them while doing research and even though they're seeing their friends, it won't be like their usual visits. Shall we meet back here just before dinner? We can have it here while they're having dinner in the Great Hall."

The others nodded and Orion finally relaxed. It was time to set the stage.

After dinner, the Marauders made their way to Orion's rooms. They shifted from foot to foot as they waited for permission to enter, but none came. Finally James summoned what courage he had left and knocked on the edge of the painting. He hurriedly stepped back as it silently swung open. A terse "Enter" called them inside, and as the portrait shut behind them, they felt almost as if they'd entered a prison.

They slowly moved into the room, taking in everything. They abruptly stopped as they realised that not only were their parents present, but the Headmaster was as well. Orion cleared his throat, drawing their attention to him.

"Sit," he said sternly.

The Marauders obediently sat down in the chairs that were left, and noted that while they may have looked comfortable, they were actually rather uncomfortable. After watching them squirm around for a few minutes, Orion spoke again. "They're charmed to be uncomfortable; I wouldn't bother trying to find a comfortable position in them." The squirming stopped as the Marauders looked guiltily at him.

"Have you figured out what went wrong?" Lily asked cautiously.

Orion looked at her silently for a long moment and then said curtly, "Yes, with the help of Salazar, Godric, and Professor Dumbledore, we have indeed figured out what went wrong. The rituals that you five combined in your effort to "help" me are quite interesting. If you had used the protection ritual only then the bond that is now linking us could be dissolved fairly easily. The second ritual creates a bond which is very difficult to break, even with the consent of both parties involved. Using a combination of the set-up for the protection ritual, and the words of the second mean that the bond between us," he paused and allowed his gaze to become piercing and his voice to drop to a more menacing tone, "is now all but impossible to break."

"What was the second ritual designed to do?" Sirius asked shakily.

Orion glared at him. "The second ritual was a slavery one. It was designed to magically bind slaves to their masters, hence why it's so difficult to get rid of. The slave would have to obey his or her master's orders and couldn't disobey them. Voldemort uses a twisted version of this ritual to bind his Death Eaters to him, but the one you used is the original."

He allowed them to digest the fact that they may have enslaved themselves to him before continuing in a hard tone, "Fortunately, the combination of the two rituals has mellowed the effect and changed the bond into something rather unique. The second ritual wasn't usually performed with love in mind, but the set-up for the protection ritual was done with precisely that, so it affected the outcome. We've been left with a bond which is nearly impossible to dissolve, but one which allows us to sense each other's general state of health and in time possibly our overall mood as well. I can also influence your marks, but we don't think the bond does any more than that. It's something I'm very grateful for and you should be too."

"So it's a good thing then?" James asked.

Orion growled at him. "No, it's not. You shouldn't have even been

doing the protection ritual in the first place and how you failed to notice that the book was open at the wrong page before you started is beyond me. I'm not even remotely pleased with this situation, and I'm even less pleased with the fact that you seem to think it's alright."

"We just wanted to help," Severus said.

Orion's frown didn't lessen as he turned to his son. "I'm not faulting you for that; it's natural that you'd want to help me. What I'm angry about is the way you chose to go about it. You disobeyed me, lied to me, stole my blood and as if that's not enough, you killed me! How could you possibly believe that doing all that was helping me?"

The Marauders had no answer for him, and Orion shook his head. "Words don't truly describe how utterly disappointed I am in the lot of you, nor how ashamed. I would have thought that you were more intelligent than this. Messing around with someone's mind is illegal except under very specific circumstances, and what you did is pretty much inexcusable. Not only did you destroy all of my Occlumency shields, you destroyed the barriers within my mind which helps keep my magic under control. Thanks to you, I've spent the past two weeks re-learning how to control my magic and also rebuilding my Occlumency shields. If I wasn't as highly trained in the mental arts as I am, and my mind wasn't as organized as it is, it would have taken a lot longer. As it is, it's still not perfect, which means I'll have to undergo a lot of testing at work before I'm allowed back on active duty, and that is something my boss is definitely not pleased with."

As the five students winced in understanding, Orion continued, "And finally, as if all that wasn't enough, you also destroyed a bond when you had no idea what it was, and were responsible for me losing five people who were very dear to me!"

"That bond was hurting you," Remus said. "It needed to be destroyed. Besides, Sev said it was a mental link and could be got rid of."

"That bond was a soul bond," Orion shot back. "According to every book I've read on them, it couldn't be broken. You've apparently done the impossible."

"Then everything's fine. Voldy's gone, you're here and we've said we're sorry, can't you forgive us?" James said. Everyone in the room stared at him and Charles shook his head in despair. That was an extremely unwise move for his son to make.

"Everything's fine," Orion whispered in a deadly tone. "No, things are not fine."

He restrained the impulse to make James' mark burn the way the Death Eaters' marks did when Voldemort was displeased with them. The link might be similar but he didn't want to act like the Dark Lord. Instead, he flicked a finger at the table behind him and stepped away from it so he wouldn't be blocking the Marauders' view of what was on it. The rapid paling of their faces told him that they understood what he was supposedly intending to do and he smirked. It was show-time.

"Dad you can't," Remus began, wincing as his mark flared with pain once more.

"Can't I?" Orion asked. "Believe me; the Headmaster certainly feels you deserve it or he wouldn't have brought it down here."

"Perhaps they would gain a better understanding if you were to describe what it would feel like," Dumbledore suggested, his eyes devoid of their usual twinkle as he looked sternly at the five students, who were looking anywhere but at the desk in front of them.

Orion nodded. "Alright. Catching the Marauders' attention once more, he said, "The punishments that used to be in place before Professor Dumbledore became the Headmaster makes detention nowadays look like an afternoon or evening of fun. Professor Dumbledore

abolished corporal punishment because the canes which were used were not only painful in their own right, but were also charmed to keep the pain at a high level for weeks on end."

As the Marauders looked at him in horror, Charles decided that a bit of elaboration was in order. He'd been skeptical of Orion's idea at first but so far it seemed to be working. "Yes they were," he said. "Normally, if you get hurt, it hurts like hell for a while but then gradually fades. Imagine, if you will, the pain never fading, just staying at the original immediate level for what seems like forever, and no pain-relief methods will work to ease it."

Now the Marauders were turning green, and Orion Black decided to chip in. "Even worse, the charm was very specific. However many strokes you got, the pain would last for the same number of weeks, plus one. That meant that if you got six strokes, you had a very difficult time sitting down for seven weeks."

"I think the Headmaster was planning on a number somewhere around twelve in this instance," Orion said thoughtfully as the Marauders looked at him with pleading expressions.

"Dad, please," Severus said, ignoring the flash of pain in his arm. "Can't you talk to Professor Dumbledore? We'll do a year's worth of detentions, just please, don't let him do that to us."

Orion smirked inwardly. Gotcha, he thought. "Well," he said, appearing as if he was considering the matter, "I did have another punishment in mind, but are you sure?"

"Yes!" the Marauders all said in unison.

Orion sat down. "Very well." He turned towards Dumbledore. "Headmaster, the students seem to feel that they'd prefer my punishment to yours," he said casually. "I'd like to thank you for offering it, but I feel that it's too distressing for them."

"I see. They do know that if it were up to me, it would happen regardless of their wishes," Dumbledore said.

Orion nodded. "Yes, but I was just going to inform them that I'd asked you to let me handle it as a private family matter. Do you agree?"

Dumbledore nodded and picked up the cane. "I do. I'll just take this with me." He eyed the Marauders and said, "Have a good night," before stepping into the fire and vanishing.

With the torture implement gone, the Marauders breathed a sigh of relief. "Um, what exactly is our punishment?" Lily asked nervously.

Orion immediately outlined the punishment he'd come up with, which included being restricted to their common room and dormitories unless in class or in the library for the remainder of the school year. If they needed to study in the library, they were to tell Orion, who would supervise them to see that they weren't reading any more dangerous books. The supervision would be discreet, as Orion would have invisibility and disillusion charms on him, but he would be there nonetheless. Furthermore, Hogsmeade visits were now forbidden until such time as Orion and the other parents decided to reinstate them. The summer restrictions brought muffled groans but none of them dared complain too loudly, the implied threat of being handed over to Dumbledore was still foremost in the Marauders' minds and none of them wanted that. Once he'd finished outlining the full extent of what he'd devised, Orion waited for their reactions.

"Dad, do you agree with Professor Potter?" Sirius asked, turning to his father.

Orion Black nodded curtly. "I do. I'm as angry and disappointed in you as he is; I never believed you would do something like this."

As Sirius winced at the reprimand from his father, James and Lily

were receiving the same treatment. Knowing that all their parents were in full agreement with each other, the students looked one another rather helplessly.

"Um, Dad," Remus said.

"Yes," Orion responded coolly.

"Despite what we've done, which we're very sorry for, is our theory about your secret right?"

Orion looked at him for a long moment and then said flatly, "Yes it is, and I'm not saying more than that at the moment."

"Why does the mark hurt when we call you Dad?" Severus asked.

Orion smirked. "That was the bond punishing you for referring to me in such a casual manner."

"Can you stop it?" James pleaded.

Orion stared at him for a few minutes and then said, "Only because it would cause too much speculation if you suddenly began addressing me as Master." He closed his eyes and fiddled with his end of the bonds for a moment, grateful that it wasn't enforcing its own will on them. When he opened his eyes again he looked at them evenly and said, "It's done."

For a moment, no one spoke, and then Remus and Severus said "Dad, do you still love us?"

Orion sighed and pulled them into a hug. "Yes, I still love you. I'm just extremely annoyed with you at the moment. It will take time to get over what's happened, but I want you to know that I will never stop loving you."

James came over to the small family and stood in front of Orion, shifting from foot to foot. When Orion turned his attention to him, James swallowed and asked, "Uncle Orion, you've said that our theory is right. Could you show us what you really look like?"

Orion sat back in a chair and shook his head. "No. If, by the end of the summer, you've all behaved, and accepted your punishment, then I will show you my true appearance. If you put those brains to work again though, you could deduce it fairly easily." Looking straight at James and Lily, he said, "What do you think a son of yours would look like?"

After giving them that question to think about, Orion left the room, taking Severus and Remus with him, and leaving James, Sirius and Lily to face their parents' reprimands and hear if they had any secondary punishments to face. As it turned out, they didn't, beyond an extremely long essay on the danger of meddling with unknown magic, and lots of extra chores.

As the Marauders fell into an uneasy, yet oddly content sleep that night, they would have been startled to know that they were thinking the same question that their parents were thinking. None of them had asked it, but they were wondering about it all the same. How had Orion come back from the dead?"

Author Note

Before all of you kill me for yet another cliff-hanger, the end question will be answered in the next chapter. As far as the link between Orion and the Marauders goes, we'll see more of it in the next chapter as well. I apologise for the long wait for an update, but as I put up on my profile, real life has been crazy lately, so I haven't had much time to write at all. The next chapter will be up as soon as I can write it, but I am going to be very busy for the next few weeks so it might be a few weeks.

May the Force be with you

Padawan Lynne

The atmosphere in the living room at Marauder Manor was somber. The Marauders were spread out around the room reading through the large number of books that Orion had acquired from his own collection and from the Hogwarts library. The Unspeakables had also lent Orion several books from their own extensive library and had offered the services of one of their own mind-healers to see if anything could be done. Orion had quietly accepted the offer and the healer was scheduled to visit the next day.

"Dad," Severus said, raising his head from his perusal of a potions book to look at his father. Orion pulled himself out of his own notes and looked evenly at his son.

"Yes," he said.

"Um, if the problem was created by a potion, couldn't a potion solve it?"

Orion pushed his notes to the side. "It could, if it was only a potion," he replied wearily. "The issue here is that it wasn't just a potion. The potion was only a part of it; the other part was the spell you used. If there is any chance at all of breaking this bond, it's likely that it will require both a potion and a spell."

"Oh," Severus said and returned to his book.

After another hour, Orion pushed his books away and stood. "Come," he said. "It's time we found out what we can and can't do with this bond."

The Marauders silently followed him as he went outside. He sat on the ground, and the Marauders sat in front of him in a semi-circle. "Close your eyes, and try and feel the bond in your minds," Orion ordered.

"Wow," James whispered. "It feels warm, and," he frowned, "I'm

worried, but it's not me."

He opened his eyes to see his uncle give him a half-smile. "So," Orion said, "sensing feelings is part of what we can do. That's good. Now, let's see if it has a particular feature."

He knew he could send pulses of magic to their marks, the short-lived, unexpected experiment when he'd first woken up in the hospital wing after the ritual had told him that, but he wanted to know if he could summon them like Voldemort could summon the Death Eaters.

"I want all of you to go to any location in the house or grounds you like, and wait there. If you feel a tingling or pulsing sensation in your mark, come to me. Oh, and I'll change my location as well, so when you feel it start to tingle, focus on where it's leading you."

The teenagers scattered, disappearing like mist and Orion waited. He would give them five minutes to find a place and wait, and then he would summon them, first as a group, and then individually.

After five minutes, during which Orion had gone to his study, he sent out a strong pulse of magic to all of their marks, sending his location with it. Then he sat back in his chair and waited.

James was the first to arrive, peering round the door and smiling when he saw he'd reached the right place. Orion waved him in and shut the door again. Next to arrive were Severus and Remus, both arriving together. Sirius and Lily were the last to arrive, and once they'd entered, Orion looked up at the ceiling.

"What did it feel like when I summoned you?" he asked neutrally.

"Like a warm tingle," Sirius answered.

"Did it hurt?"

"No, it just got warm,"

"Good," Orion said with a sigh of relief.

"Why are you relieved?" Severus asked.

"Because," Orion said, "when Voldemort summons the Death Eaters, their marks burn, and it hurts them. The last thing I want to do is hurt you, so yes, I'm relieved to hear that it didn't hurt."

"Now what are we doing?" Remus enquired.

"We're going to try it again, only this time, I'm going to summon you individually," Orion said with a smirk. "I called you as a group last time; I want to see if I can do it individually or not."

Sighing, the Marauders left the study and went to their hiding places again. Orion gave them five minutes and then considered who to call first. Deciding on Severus, he found the strand of magic connecting his mark to Severus' and sent a pulse down it.

Severus was sitting in the living room, reading through a book on old rituals when his mark warmed. Closing the book he made his way back to his father's study, where he found Orion reading a letter and scowling.

"Dad? When did that arrive?"

Orion looked up. "Severus. Oh good, it did work. This is nothing, just a letter I've been ignoring for the past few days. Putting it aside, he said, "Sit down and be quiet, I'm going to call the others."

Obediently, Severus sank into a chair and waited. The letter that his father had put on the desk was right in front of him but he didn't touch it. The events of the past few weeks had taught him the danger of

unrestrained curiosity and so he kept his hands on the arms of the chair, choosing to look around the rest of the study instead. Footsteps outside stopped his examination of the room and he smiled as Remus came in. Sitting down beside his brother, Remus didn't even glance at the letter; he was more interested in the number of old-looking books stacked around the room.

Soon afterwards James, Sirius and Lily joined them and Orion looked at them, both pleased and disturbed at the results of the experiment. He didn't want to be like Voldemort but didn't see any other use for that particular feature of the bond. Pushing it to the back of his mind, he pushed his chair back and stood.

"Now that we've established that I can call you with it, I'm going to let you off research for the rest of the day," he said.

"But, Uncle Orion, what are we going to do if we're not doing research?" James asked.

Orion stared at him until he started to shift uneasily in his chair. "Have you finished all your homework?" he asked.

"Yes, we finished it last week," James told him.

Orion looked surprised. "Oh. Well, go and do something relaxing. Play a game or something like that. No flying though."

"We can do something fun?" Sirius asked.

Orion smirked. "Just because you're not allowed to leave the grounds without either me or your parents, doesn't mean that I'm going to keep you studying all day. For one, that's not productive as you'll get tired and therefore won't be thinking clearly, and for another, I'm giving you an opportunity to earn back some trust here."

"Trust?" Lily queried.

"Yes. You lost it because of the ritual fiasco, but you need to be given the opportunity to earn it back so I'm giving you one. I'm trusting that you'll be able to amuse yourselves without resorting to flying or needing to go somewhere other than here. Now go, I need to talk to Charles."

The Marauders rose and left the study, hardly able to believe their good fortune. As they filed out, Remus halted and looked back. "Dad," he said.

"Yes, Remus," Orion replied, turning from where he was examining a book.

"Um, does this mean you've forgiven us?"

Orion hated the hopeful tone in his son's voice because he knew that what he said next would dash that hope.

"Not yet." As Remus' expression turned from hopeful to mournful, Orion sighed. "Remus, I can't just say that I've forgiven you and everything goes back to normal. If this was just about a prank or something like that then yes, I could, but what you and the others have done is most likely permanent, not to mention illegal. I'm working on it, but you shouldn't expect it too soon, alright."

Remus nodded silently and went to find his friends. At least Orion hadn't said forgiveness was impossible, he thought in a vain attempt to comfort himself. Finding his friends stretched out on the grass, he joined their rather subdued conversation about how in Merlin's name they were going to undo what they'd done.

Two weeks later, with the summer almost over and the need for school supplies rapidly approaching, Orion called all the Marauders as well as their parents to Marauder Manor.

"We haven't been able to find a way of undoing the bond," he said bluntly. "Fortunately, we have more than just this summer to find a way, but for now, I've decided to call it off. We've exhausted all our current options and there are more pressing matters to attend to."

"Such as what?" Orion Black enquired. "I was under the impression that our offspring still had two more weeks of their sentence before it ended."

"They do, however, we do need to give them opportunities to gain back trust, therefore I thought it would be a good idea to go school shopping sometime this week, and they can get their supplies while having a fun day out. They can't be miserable all the time," Orion said reasonably.

"And by letting them get their supplies on their own, it lets them know that we do trust them a bit," Emma said in understanding. "That sounds good, when were you planning on going?"

"In two days time," Orion said.

"That works for me," Orion Black said after a minute. "Would you object to Regulus coming too?"

Orion shook his head. "Not at all, it would be silly to go twice when once will do."

"That works for us too," Daniel Evans said after a brief conversation with his wife. When Charles and Emma added their agreement, Orion relaxed and turned a cool gaze to the Marauders.

"As for you lot," he said, hiding a smile as they started to look worried, "do you think you've been good enough to learn the real story behind the secret you figured out?"

"Yes," they answered in unison, looking excited. Orion looked around

the room and saw the same interest mirrored in the eyes of both the adults and the teenagers.

"Very well," he said with an exaggerated shrug.

"Dad, can you show us your true appearance first?" Severus asked eagerly.

Orion smirked. "Firstly, can any of you tell me what a son of James and Lily's might look like?"

The Marauders looked at each other and then James answered hesitantly, "Well, given that in our family sons tend to look like their fathers, I would say that a son of ours would look like me, but I'd hope that he had his mother's eyes."

Orion closed his eyes and shivered. The glamour charms fell off him, and when he looked at them, his hair was once again short and messy, and his eyes were the same green as Lily's. "Hello Dad," he said with a smirk.

James was staring at him in shock. "You, you're," he turned to the other Marauders who were all as shocked as he was. Further conversation was stopped as they all fainted.

"Well, that was interesting," Orion commented, poking James with a toe. "He's out cold," he said as the conscious members of the group were still staring at him.

"It's quite a shock," Orion Black said after a few minutes. "I presume you knew," he said to Charles, who nodded silently. Turning to Daniel, the wizard was met with another silent nod, indicating prior knowledge of Orion's secret.

"If they knew," he said, turning back to Orion with a somewhat hurt look, "then why didn't you tell me?"

Orion looked a bit ashamed. "I already had too many people knowing my secret as it was. I didn't want to add another unless I absolutely had to. My purpose here is to destroy Voldemort before nineteen-eighty-one and if he knew who I really was, he wouldn't rest until the entire Potter family was wiped out of existence. I couldn't take that chance."

Orion Black nodded slowly. "OK, I can understand that. However, since I do know your secret now, could I know your real name? Just so we don't get mixed up again?"

Orion smiled bleakly. "It's Harry," he said coolly. "Harry James Potter."

"It suits you," was the reply he got.

Before they could talk any further the Marauders began waking up. On seeing Orion they swallowed hard before shaking their heads vigorously to clear the fuzzy feeling from them. "Uh, Dad, is that really what you look like?" Remus asked.

"Yes, it's me," Orion said reassuringly, changing his eyes back to gold again for a moment. "Do you have any questions for me?"

"Yes," Severus said immediately. "It's obvious that James and Lily are your future parents now, but the rest of us, is Sirius really your future godfather?"

"Yes, and Remus is my surrogate uncle," Orion said neutrally.

"That leaves me as your mentor, whom you hated for your first few years at Hogwarts," Severus said with a shiver.

"Hey," Orion said, kneeling in front of him. "I was a child when I first met you, and you were an adult. The situation then was quite

different. You weren't part of the Marauders, you were their enemy, and the grudge you had against James prevented you from seeing me as just another student. That all changed in my sixth and seventh years. You became my surrogate father after Sirius and Remus died."

"We died?" Sirius said, shocked.

"Yes," Orion said flatly. "And it almost ended up killing me."

"Is that why you don't like Professor Dumbledore?" Lily asked.

"It's part of the reason," Orion said with a growl. "The rest of it is complicated."

He went into his study and pulled out the collar and the Pensieve. Coming back, he placed both items in front of the Marauders and sat down. "Why I don't like Dumbledore is because of a series of events," he said. "Can any of you tell me what the runes on this collar say?"

The Marauders all squinted at the runes and then one by one shook their heads, disappointed. Orion picked it up and ran his fingers over the runes. "Don't be upset," he said quietly, "they are difficult to decipher if you've only just started studying Ancient Runes. They say, more or less, bind eighty percent of magic. Dumbledore collared and Marked me when I was five years old. He was also responsible for the deaths of my grandparents and the imprisonment of my godfather."

"What?" the Marauders exclaimed.

Orion nodded grimly. "I didn't find out about it until I was seventeen. He came to Potter Manor, killed my grandparents and made it seem like Death Eaters had done it. Then, when a prophecy was given which suggested that either I or another child would be the one to defeat Voldemort, he convinced Mum and Dad to go into hiding

under the Fidelius Charm. He knew the Secret Keeper wasn't Sirius but he let Sirius go to prison so he would be able to place me with my only living relatives, my maternal aunt and uncle. Relatives, I might add, that my mother specifically stated I not be placed with."

"So what happened?" James asked, horrified.

Orion gave him a sad smile. "I spent the next ten years being the Muggle version of a house-elf, and they forbade any mention of magic. Any instances of accidental magic were severely punished and when my Hogwarts letters began arriving, they ran rather than admit what I was. Anyway, when I got to Hogwarts, Dumbledore made himself appear as the perfect grandfatherly type, and I trusted him completely, much as Dad did. He set up various tests for me, which I didn't recognize as being tests, I thought they were just weird and sometimes dangerous adventures. Once I reached seventeen, I found out the whole truth and that was when I began to hate Dumbledore."

"Can you show us?" Severus asked shakily.

Orion stared at him for a long moment. "How much do you want to see and are you sure you really want to know," he asked.

"We have to know," Severus replied. "And as for how much, well," he looked at the others who nodded in agreement, "everything."

"Everything?" Orion asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Everything. Well, not your whole life but the major events," James said.

Orion shrugged, but put the required memories in the Pensieve. "Let's go then," he said.

They fell into the Pensieve together, and reappeared in a memory

which made Orion smile. "Ah, the first trip to Diagon Alley," he said.

The Marauders smiled as a younger version of Orion, accompanied by Hagrid went around the Alley, collecting his supplies for first year. They followed the pair into the Leaky Cauldron and heard for the first time why Orion was famous.

"That's awful," Lily said as Hagrid told the young Harry about his parents' deaths and him being the Boy-Who-Lived.

"Yeah but wow, being the only person to have survived a Killing Curse," Severus said in admiration. "Dad, are you immune to them now?"

"No," Orion said shortly. "How I survived it will be explained later, and how I survived when you lot killed me will also be explained later as well."

The Marauders went quiet as the memory dissolved and a new one formed.

"The first train ride to Hogwarts," Orion said with another smile. They watched as Harry met Ron and the two became friends, and drove off Draco Malfoy.

"Uncle Orion, is Draco Lucius' future son?" James asked.

"Yes, but Draco is more like his grandfather than his father," Orion responded as the scene changed to the Sorting and Harry's choice between Gryffindor and Slytherin.

Memories rushed by, the Mirror of Erised, the clues leading to the Philosopher's Stone, Quidditch, and the confrontation with Quirrell. At the end of the first-year memories, Orion stopped the playback and waited for the Marauders to catch their breath.

"And we thought our school years were exciting," Sirius commented.
"Yours were, how on earth did you manage to get any work done?"

"With difficulty," Orion admitted.

"Now onto the second year," he said.

The second year memories brought more gasps from the Marauders. They cheered at the flying car and groaned when Harry and Ron were caught. The revelation of Harry's Parseltongue ability and the complete incompetence of Lockhart were met with shock and sympathy, while his confrontation with Voldemort's spirit and the Basilisk brought more cheers from the boys while Lily covered her eyes, unable to watch.

"That diary, is that the one you're after?" Severus asked.

"Yes," Orion said as the memories continued to play out in front of them.

Third year was more subduing as they saw the effect a Dementor had on Harry. Remus' entrance as the Defence professor cheered them up, and the appearance of the Marauders' Map prompted James to immediately suggest that they refine their version of it as soon as they got out of the Pensieve. Harry's confrontation with Sirius at the end of the year and his and Hermione's subsequent rescue of him brought a sigh of relief from the younger version who said that at least he hadn't had to watch himself being Kissed.

Fourth year was more sobering as the Marauders could tell that the danger level had significantly increased. The Tournament tasks scared them half to death, but the Yule Ball, and Harry's attempt at asking Hermione to be his partner brought smiles to their faces and more than one of the boys looked sideways at Orion, who was looking at the scene with a bitter smile. A small tear made its way down his face as his younger self danced with Hermione at the Ball.

"Did you end up marrying her?" Lily asked quietly.

"Yes, she was my wife," Orion said with an effort.

The fight with Voldemort and the Priori Incantatem elicited more gasps from the Marauders, who were almost as upset as Harry was over Cedric's death. The revelation that the Moody who'd taught them the Unforgivables was in fact a Death Eater didn't surprise them, and the end of the year was a relief for all the watchers.

Fifth year brought more indignation and annoyance from the teenagers as they watched Umbridge turn Hogwarts into her own personal empire. They cheered as Harry led the student rebellion and the DA was greeted with speculation as to whether they could set up something similar. The Blood Quill was growled at, while Severus winced as the Occlumency lessons ended in disaster.

"How could you teach me properly after what I did to you?" he whispered.

"Because you ended up teaching me properly, and I, as you saw, didn't do my part all that well," Orion whispered back.

The Pensieve memory made all of them wince. "Sev, for what my older self did to you, I'm sorry," James said after watching it.

"Apology unnecessary but accepted," was the reply.

The confrontation afterwards and Harry's desperate plea to know if he'd inherited more from his mother than just her eye colour marked the start of the change in the relationship between Harry and the older version of Severus. The end of the year and the visit to the Department of Mysteries went by with little comment from the Marauders, as they were still shaken by the Occlumency disaster.

Sixth year also went by with little comment, other than a bit of teasing over the development of a relationship between Harry and Ginny. Orion watched these memories with a scowl, and when asked why he was scowling he said curtly, "Just wait."

Seventh year was when everything fell apart. Ginny dosing Harry with Amortentia brought a snarl from Lily, and Ron's attempt to control Hermione brought snarls from the boys. The poisoning made the Marauders try to kill Ron and only Orion's reminder that they were in a memory made them stop. Then came Sirius and Remus' deaths and Harry's breakdown over that almost made everyone cry. After that came the last revelation, the extent of Dumbledore's actions against Harry, and the Marauders finally understood why Orion hated the old wizard so much.

The memories weren't stopping there though. The final battle with Voldemort, Harry's acceptance into the Unspeakables, his and Hermione's marriage, the birth of their children and finally, the day they were killed.

When they emerged from the Pensieve, the Marauders were silent for several minutes, and then as one, they hugged Orion tightly. "It's no wonder you came back here," Lily murmured, trying her best to break Orion's ribs with as tight a hug as she could manage.

"Yeah, after everything you went through," James said, also hugging Orion as tightly as he could. "Why didn't you kill Dumbledore though?"

"Because I couldn't prove anything," Orion said, frustrated. "Everything except the collar and the Mark was circumstantial and even those could be explained away as helping a young child to control his powerful accidental magic. Parents can put spells on their children to restrict their magic if the accidental magic outbursts threaten to harm them. My own children, as I'm sure you saw, managed to almost bring down the house when a surge of magic

took out several load-bearing walls."

"Yeah but that was because they stole their mum's wand," Sirius said. "It wasn't strictly accidental magic."

"What's this?" Orion Black asked, interested.

Orion replayed the memory for them, and sunk into a chair.

Flashback

Orion returned home from a visit with Arthur and Molly Weasley hoping that his children were home from visiting their cousins as he wanted to take them to Diagon Alley. Rubbing his eyes, he blinked rapidly, hoping that he was seeing things. When he'd left, the house had been standing straight as it always had, but now it was sagging alarmingly to one side.

"Hermione?" he yelled, entering the house at a run. "Daniel, Sirius, Lily, where are you?"

"We're in here, Harry," Hermione called out.

"Thank goodness you're alright," he said as he pulled her into a tight hug. He then knelt and hugged his children as well. "What happened?"

"I think Daniel and Sirius should explain that," Hermione said coolly.

Harry raised an eyebrow. "Surely they're not responsible for this, they're only three!"

"We, we wanted to help decorate," Sirius said, pronouncing the word decorate slowly so he got it right. "So we held Mum's wand and swished it like she does and then the walls fell down."

"You took your mother's wand," Harry repeated. "Daniel, Sirius, what have we told you about wands?"

"Not to touch them," Sirius answered.

"But you said we could," Daniel protested at the same time.

"I said you could touch your mother's wand?" Harry asked, confused.

"Yes, you said that we could help demolish the house, and then you could reno, revate," Sirius said enthusiastically.

Harry groaned, he now knew where they'd got the idea from. "Dear, I think we should be more careful what we say around them," he said.

"Why?" Hermione asked with a frown.

"That conversation we had the other day, where I said that if their accidental magic got any more powerful they could demolish the house. Then I said that we probably needed to do some renovations anyway."

"Yes," Hermione said, not following where Harry was going.

"They thought that that was permission to help with the decorating."

"Oh no," Hermione groaned. "So they thought that I was just having a rest from decorating and decided to help."

"Essentially, yes," Harry said.

"Dad, are we in trouble?" Sirius asked.

Harry looked at him. "Should you be?" he asked.

Sirius looked at his brother and then first slowly shook their heads

before nodding them just as slowly. "We didn't mean to make a mess," Daniel said plaintively.

Harry fought back a smile. "Have you learnt not to play with wands?" he asked sternly.

"Yes," they said in unison.

"OK. Just, go and play outside for a while, but be careful. Daddy and Mummy have to fix the house."

The boys raced outside, followed by their one-year-old sister, while Hermione and Harry looked at the mess in despair. How on earth were they going to fix what their mischievous three-year-olds had done?"

End flashback.

At the conclusion of the memory, Charles, Emma, Orion Black, Daniel and Rose were in fits of laughter. "Oh, oh that's funny," Charles said, catching himself as he almost fell out of his chair. "Watch what you say around young children indeed, oh that's priceless."

"Did you get the house fixed, Uncle Orion?" James asked.

"Yes, eventually. It did have a slight lean to it afterwards," Orion replied with rueful smile. "They didn't mean any harm, they thought they were helping but really, what is it with me and children – my first lot almost bring down the house and the second lot end up killing me. Honestly, the things you'll do in the name of helping someone really bring home the meaning of the phrase, the road to hell is paved with good intentions."

"That's one other thing we want to know," Daniel said suddenly. "How the hell did you come back from the dead?"

Orion sobered up. "I had some help," he said. Everyone stopped laughing and sat down on chairs or couches to listen. "First you need to know that when my parents died, they managed to attach their spirits to me and they built a small replica of Godric's Hollow within my one-and-a-half-year-old mind. That way, they would always be with me. Then, when Sirius and Remus died in my seventh year, they managed to do the same, although I'm not sure how. Severus' older self attached some of his spirit to me when I freed him from the Dark Mark, also in my seventh year. So, I was walking around with five spirits in my head and not aware of any of them."

"So they helped you?" Lily said.

"Yes, they did, but at a cost," Orion replied tersely. "They had been living as it were, in Godric's Hollow and I was unaware of them until I fought Voldemort in your first year at Hogwarts, when I ended up in St Mungo's. I discovered them then, and was able to have conversations with them and visit them. It was great, I was finally able to meet my parents and talk with them, and get to know them. This continued right up until that blasted ritual. When I died, it severed my connection to them but they were able to use the energy released from that connection to restart my heart. I was officially dead for five seconds and then my heart restarted. Unfortunately, with the connection broken, they can't live in my head anymore. It's like they've died all over again, which is extremely difficult for me to come to terms with. I can call them in their animagus forms as Patroni but they won't be solid. I won't see them again until I die, and if I do, then there's no coming back. I've used up my last return-from-death card."

"So the five people who were very dear to you, they're our older selves," James said, shocked and chagrined. "No wonder you didn't want to talk to us afterwards. It's a wonder you even looked at us."

Orion smiled bitterly. "I think I now understand what Severus' older

self must have felt like every time he looked at me. It wasn't so bad when you were younger, the resemblance to your older selves was still emerging, and it wasn't so obvious. Now though, I can see the wizards and witch that you'll eventually become and knowing that I can never talk to your older selves again really, really hurts. That's why I'm having trouble forgiving you, why I'm still annoyed and upset over what happened."

"Because you're having trouble separating us from our older selves," Lily said.

Orion nodded. "Yes, and I shouldn't be, I mean, you are different from them, not in major ways but in small ones. That doesn't change the fact that you essentially killed people I loved, and I can never see them again, unless I die myself."

"But you won't die yet, will you?" Severus asked. "I mean, what about us?"

Orion ruffled his hair. "I'll stick around, don't worry, but I will have to face Voldemort again sooner or later."

"What do you mean?" Remus asked.

"I mean that no matter what time I'm in, I'm still the Chosen One," Orion responded, pushing up his hair to show them the scar. "It's my job to get rid of Voldemort and I'll do it before history starts to repeat itself. I'll probably die doing it but you'll see me again, just in a smaller form."

"You mean you'll come back as your future self?"

"Yes, Sirius, I'll probably inhabit my baby self and grow up with my parents as I should have done all along," Orion said calmly. "Unfortunately, Voldemort and I will have to kill each other at the same time because now that you've destroyed the soul bond, there's

no other way that I can die with him."

"You mean that bond was supposed to..." Severus trailed off, sickened.

"Yes, it was supposed to ensure that both Voldemort and I died together," Orion said shortly.

"Well, in that case, I'm glad it's gone," James said determinedly. "I want you around when your future self is born."

Orion sighed in exasperation. "James, I can't be around when my future self is born. It doesn't matter that I've changed my name, I'm still Harry Potter, and there can't be two Harry Potters in the same place at the same time!"

"Oh," James said. "Well, can you at least hold off on killing the Dork Lord until we've graduated from Hogwarts?"

"I think I can promise that," Orion said. "Voldemort's either in a coma or floating round as a spirit anyway so I don't think we need to worry about him overly much at the moment."

"We might not need to worry about him, but what about them?" Lily asked, pointing a shaking finger at the window.

Looking outside, Orion's blood ran cold. Outside on the lawn stood all of the Death Eaters and they all had their wands pointed straight at him.

Author Note

Hey everyone. I'm glad I finally got this chapter written, it's the third version of it so I'm glad to be done with it. The next chapter will be up when I get it written, but as with this chapter, I won't have much time due to real life. I'm currently trying to sort out university classes which

start in March, and I and my partner are also looking for a flat as well. Apart from all this, my muse is currently fixated on Chronicles of the Chosen One, I have the first chapter of the rewritten version done and part of the second. I am also still working on my second original story, which is taking a lot of my writing time. I hope you enjoy this chapter though, and I will endeavour to get the next one done as soon as possible.

May the Force be with you

Padawan Lynne

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